Schopenhauer and Beckett:

Theatre of Asceticism

By

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Declaration

This thesis is my original work, undertaken in the School of Philosophy in the Research School of Social Sciences (RSSS), The Australian National University.

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Abstract

It is the central argument of this thesis that the three Beckett plays *Waiting for Godot, Endgame*, and *Happy Days* can be understood as Schopenhauerian-informed *theatre of asceticism*. By proposing an understanding of Beckett's middle-period tragedies as works that promote life-denial, this work presents a challenge to the life-affirming reading of Beckett's work presented by Adorno, Cavell, Deleuze, Critchley, and Badiou, for whom Beckett exemplifies art's capacity to provide genuine resistance to nihilism.

In contrast to the life-affirming interpretation of Beckett's work, I believe the spectator to the performance of these three tragedies witnesses something unique in the history of theatre: deliberately generated, self-inflicted physical and mental suffering undertaken with the intention of attaining a painless, will-less, state. Beckett is the first tragedian to stage ascetic practice where, in Schopenhauerian terms, the human intellect refuses the agreeable and, instead, looks for disagreeable in its attempts to break the will.

To understand Beckett's contribution to asceticism, it is vital that we understand Beckett's work in relation to Schopenhauer, Beckett's most important ascetic predecessor. In the process of developing his own ascetic method – that of representational deprivation – I argue that Beckett appears to draw upon and further develop the central aspects of Schopenhauer's philosophical system. By so doing, Beckett incorporates both ascetic and non-ascetic elements of Schopenhauerian philosophy into his own ascetic thought. These non-ascetic aspects include Schopenhauer's understanding of the dynamically sublime, the experience of boredom, and the conception of the self as a single entity comprised of willing and knowing subjects.

By appreciating the foundation upon which Beckettian asceticism appears to be built, one can then also appreciate the significant development of asceticism that one finds in Beckett's tragedies.

On Beckett's stage, one witnesses the practice of a variety of ascetic methods which focus on inhibiting the body, methods such as self-mortification, fasting, poverty, and celibacy. With a long history of implementation, these ascetic methods may be referred to as 'traditional' asceticism. It is this version of asceticism that Schopenhauer discusses at length in the Fourth Book of *The World as Will and Representation*. In addition to the depiction of traditional asceticism, Beckett employs the artistic medium of tragedy to display the effectiveness of radical ascetic methods of his own devising. These 'Beckettian' ascetic methods, which operate in conjunction with traditional methods, focus on depriving the will – that perpetually striving aspect of the self (WWR 1: 164-5) – of the knowledge that it requires to strive. In its attempts to attain the will-quieted state of 'nothingness', Beckettian asceticism starves the mind as much as it starves the body.

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Reference Code

Works by Schopenhauer

WWR (1966), *The World as Will and Representation* (vols 1 & 2), trans. by E F J Payne, Dover, New York.

PART ONE:

Introduction and Literature Review

Chapter 1: Introduction

In the second volume of *The World as Will and Representation* the 19th century German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer discusses a number of important thinkers in the history of *quietism*. For Schopenhauer, quietism, or 'the giving up of all willing', and the supportive practice of *asceticism*, the 'intentional mortification of one's own will', both follow the *mystic* understanding of 'the identity of one's own inner being with that of all things' (WWR 2: 613). Schopenhauer's catalogue of quietist thinkers and practitioners includes Saint Francis of Assisi, Blaise Pascal, the Buddha Sakya Muni, Meister Eckhart, and Madame de Guyon (WWR 2: 613-615)—a disparate group of thinkers who, for Schopenhauer, recognise that it is one's unchecked desires that cause one to suffer.

Schopenhauer's own considerable contribution to the study of quietism – one that necessitates his name being placed alongside the aforementioned thinkers – is to explore the cause of one's suffering, which Schopenhauer describes as the 'will-to-life'. It is the will-to-life within every living thing that forever drives one forward. It is the unplacatable nature of the will that causes one to suffer. Like the thinkers who come before him, Schopenhauer recommends a process of systematically denying the will-to-life by depriving it of nourishment. At the heart of Schopenhauerian asceticism is the systematic denial of the body. It is Schopenhauer's understanding of the will-to-life, and the necessity of denying the will that subsequently appeals to many of the artists of the first rank who are subsequently influenced by Schopenhauer's work (Young: 2005: 246). It has long been understood that the 20th century author and playwright Samuel Beckett is one such artist.

But what, exactly, are we to make of Beckett's sustained interest in the subject of Schopenhauerian life denial? Is Beckett an advocate of quietism, a thinker whose

work should be considered in the light of committed quietists such as Schopenhauer? Or does Beckett's work ultimately provide a critique of the possibility of ever quieting one's desires? The present position on the subject of Beckett and quietism understands Beckett as a thinker whose work engages with quietist ethics, but who ultimately calls into question the viability of such a worldview. Though Beckett is no doubt intrigued by the notion of being able to quiet one's desires, Beckett's interpreters argue that he remains ultimately unconvinced, and therefore uncommitted (see Ackerley, 2000, 2004).

In contrast to this position on the subject of Beckett and life-denial, I believe that a number of Beckett's middle-period tragedies can be understood as the work of a sincere and committed quietist. Indeed, I believe that an updated list of history's important quietists, one that incorporates the thinkers who lived and worked after the death of Schopenhauer, would be wholly incomplete if it did not include the name Samuel Beckett. Not only ought Beckett to be considered in this light, but a number of Beckett's middle-period tragedies – *Waiting for Godot, Endgame*, and *Happy Days* – should be considered alongside *The World as Will and Representation* as significant contributions to the study of asceticism as a form of ethical practice.

On Beckett's stage, one witnesses the practice of a variety of ascetic methods which focus on inhibiting the body's ability to function, methods such as self-mortification, fasting, poverty, and celibacy. With a long history of implementation, these ascetic methods may be understood as 'traditional' asceticism. It is this version of asceticism that Schopenhauer discusses at length in the Fourth Book of *The World as Will and Representation*. In addition to the depiction of traditional asceticism, Beckett also employs the tragic form to display the effectiveness of radical ascetic methods of his own devising. I shall refer to these methods as 'Beckettian asceticism'. These 'Beckettian' ascetic methods, which operate in conjunction with traditional methods, focus on depriving the will – that perpetually striving aspect of the self (WWR 1: 164-5) – of the knowledge that it requires to strive. In its attempts to attain the will-quieted state of 'nothingness', Beckettian asceticism starves the mind as much as it starves the body.

This understanding of Beckett's middle-period tragedies as *theatre of asceticism* presents a challenge to the life-affirming reading of Beckett's work presented in the interpretive work of Adorno, Cavell, Deleuze, Critchley, and Badiou, for whom Beckett exemplifies art's capacity to provide genuine resistance to nihilism (Weller, 2006: viii). In contrast to the life-affirming interpretation of Beckett's work, I believe the spectator to the performance of these three middle-period tragedies witnesses something unique in the history of theatre: deliberately generated, self-inflicted physical and mental suffering undertaken with the intention of breaking the will, and thus attaining a painless, will-less, state. Beckett is the first tragedian to stage ascetic practice where, in Schopenhauerian terms, the human intellect refuses the agreeable and, instead, looks for the disagreeable (WWR 1: 392) in its attempts to break the will.

To better appreciate Beckett's significant contribution to the field of asceticism, or life-denial, I believe it is vital that we understand Beckett's work in relation to the work of Arthur Schopenhauer, Beckett's most important ascetic predecessor. Whilst it is now known that Beckett studied the works of a number of quietist thinkers, including the works of Thomas à Kempis, Arnold Geulincx, and Meister Eckhart,[i] Beckett's repeated utilization of asceticism as a means to attain a quieted will indicates the importance of Schopenhauer to Beckett's conception of quietism. It is in the work of Schopenhauer that Beckett first encounters asceticism, the active, will-inhibiting element of quietist ethics, and it is Schopenhauer's depiction of asceticism in the Fourth Book of *The World as Will and Representation* which Beckett repeatedly draws upon in his middle period tragedies. Only by understanding the foundation upon which Beckettian asceticism is built can one then also appreciate the significant development of asceticism that one finds in Beckett's work.

When viewed in the light of Schopenhauer's philosophical system, Beckett's work can be understood as an attempt to portray both the effective and the ineffective means of breaking one's will, or having one's will turn its back on life. It can be

argued that by staging the ascetic process, by revealing both the successful and unsuccessful methods for breaking one's will, along with the significant obstacles that confront the ascetic practitioner, Beckett's middle-period tragedies not only advocate resignation (cf. WWR 2: 433-4), they teach one how to resign (cf. Nietzsche, 1968: 434-5).

This genetic understanding of Beckett's middle-period tragedies – as a sustained, productive, engagement with the life denying thought of Arthur Schopenhauer – is an understanding that is supported by the content of Beckett's published works, and by the extensive biographical and archival material that is now available to Beckett scholars.

The approach taken by literature, comparative literature, and history to the pre-Nietzschean philosophical component of Beckett's work

> Since the opening up of the Beckett archive, there has been renewed critical enthusiasm for the philosophical works with which Beckett engaged (Boxall, 2010: 35).

In marked contrast to the discipline of philosophy, which has yet to explore the matter of Beckett's engagement with quietist thought,[ii] in the fields of literature, comparative literature, and history, Beckett's sustained interest in Western quietism is well documented. Beckett is known to have both studied, and later incorporated a range of quietist thought into many of his published works. It is now understood that Beckett studied the works of Christian quietists of the Middle Ages, the 17th century Occasionalism of Arnold Geulincx, and, most comprehensively of all, the 19th century atheistic quietism of Arthur Schopenhauer. Beckett scholars have established Beckett's engagement with quietism by gaining access to Beckett's extensive reading and writing notebooks held in the Beckett Collection at the

University of Reading, through Beckett's personal correspondence, and by exploring moments in Beckett's work where quietist thinkers are named, cited, or alluded to.[iii] The archival material, and Beckett's personal correspondence suggests that Schopenhauer was a particularly important thinker for the development of Beckett's thought (Feldman, 2010: 168). Indeed, it is now known that Beckett studied Schopenhauerian philosophy over the course of five decades.

It is well known that Beckett first encounters Schopenhauerian philosophy during the process of writing his critical monograph on Marcel Proust in 1930. Aware of Proust's interest in Schopenhauer, Beckett reads *À la recherche du temps perdu* through the lens of Schopenhauerian aesthetics (Rosen, 1976: 145; Wood, 1994: 4; Nixon, 2011). During this period letters to friends evince a great deal of interest in Schopenhauerian thought, especially Schopenhauer's focus on the subject of unhappiness: 'an intellectual justification for unhappiness' as Beckett describes Schopenhauer's work in a letter to his friend Thomas MacGreevy (Knowlson, 1996: 118; Nixon, 2011: 9). This attitude towards Schopenhauerian philosophy, and the effect this had on Beckett's outlook continued long after writing *Proust*:

> While the influence of Schopenhauer on *Proust* has long been noted in Anglophone scholarship, Beckett's gravitation towards the former's 'veil of Maya' ... is without a doubt, a major influence on both Beckett's artistic temperament and his philosophical outlook during the interwar period (Feldman, 2009: 23).

It is now known that Beckett studied Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation* while writing *Proust* (Nixon, 2011: 9). In addition to this, it is also now known that Beckett studied Schopenhauer's doctoral dissertation, *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason* in the period 1936-7, and notes were taken on it in Beckett's *Whoroscope* notebook. As Pothast indicates, Beckett appears to have studied Schopenhauer's doctoral thesis 'extensively', his notes on the work revealing particular interest in the ideas of cause and effect (Pothast,

2008: 13). Indeed, Beckett returned to Schopenhauer on numerous occasions; Beckett referred to Schopenhauerian philosophy as one of the 'old chestnuts' – alongside the works of thinkers such as Pascal and Dante – which he revisited time and time again (Knowlson, 1996: 653). For instance, Pothast cites Beckett's notebooks from the late 1970s, which reveal an ongoing interest in Schopenhauer's works, an interest that was not limited to Schopenhauer's major work, and doctoral dissertation but also included essays in *Parerga and Paralipomena*:

> Just as Beckett turned to Schopenhauer as a young man, he still turned to him in his seventies – possibly more intensely and more thoroughly than before (Pothast, 2008: 14-16).

Pothast continues:

> There can be little doubt that Beckett's interest in Schopenhauer was a lifelong intellectual commitment, probably stronger and deeper than his contact with any other of the many philosophers whom he quotes or refers to in passing (Pothast, 2008: 189; see also Feldman, 2006: 12-14; Weller, 2009: 43-44).

To date, the analysis of Beckett's engagement with Schopenhauerian thought has focused on two areas in particular: Beckett's utilization of Schopenhauerian aesthetics and epistemology (see Pothast, 2008), and Beckett's engagement with Schopenhauerian ethics, particularly with regard to Schopenhauer's resignationism (see Weller, 2005, Chapter 2). It is a central argument of this thesis that when Beckett scholars interpret Beckett's engagement with the latter, namely the resignationism found in Schopenhauerian ethics, the matter of asceticism has been overlooked.

Whilst the disciplines of literature, comparative literature, and history have begun to work through the implications of Beckett's well-documented engagement with a number of specific quietist thinkers, and broader areas of quietist thought, this investigation has centred on the passive aspects of quietism, namely the quietist acts of humility, indifference, and the negative disregard for oneself (see Rosen, 1976: 26-7; Weller, 2005: Chapter 2; Feldman, 2008, 44). For instance, Weller (2005), presents Beckett's quietism primarily as the giving up of all willing, where one ceases to strive after objectives. Weller therefore understands Beckett's quietism as a matter of 'pure passivity':

> ... All that the suffering creature can do in the painful meantime of willing is to hope or pray—and wait... All will depend upon a 'dispensation' or what... in *Ill Seen Ill Said* (1981) is termed 'grace'... Regarded in this light... the 'nothing to be done' is not a task, but pure passivity, utter dependence on an Other whose power to grant or withhold grace is absolute (Weller, 2005: 81).[iv]

Thus in Beckett scholarship, Beckett's quietism is understood as a continuation of the quietist thought found in the work of thinkers such as Arnold Geulincx, for whom the virtue of humility counsels will-lessness after the recognition of one's powerlessness: 'Wherein you have no power, therein neither should you will' (cite in Feldman, 2008: 44).

This particular understanding of quietism as passivity alone has meant that the more active, or aggressive, aspect of Beckett's quietism, *asceticism*, which plays an important role in Schopenhauerian ethics, is yet to garner the same level of critical attention as Beckett's interest in the passive aspects of quietist thought. Despite th repeated implementation of ascetic methods across a number of Beckett's middle-period tragedies – methods such as celibacy, fasting, self-mortification, and self-castigation – none of the academic fields that engage with Beckett's work have

attempted to understand Beckett's depiction of these practices as an attempt to convey an ascetic method.

To understand how Beckett's tragic characters attain a quieted state, as I later argue a number of them do, one needs to understand Beckett's debt to Schopenhauer, and in particular, Schopenhauer's focus on ascetic practice as a means of maintaining a quieted will.

The approach taken by philosophy to the pre-Nietzschean philosophical component of Beckett's work

Unlike the disciplines of literature, comparative literature, and history, the discipline of philosophy has yet to respond to the challenge that extensive archival and biographical material presents to the dominant understanding of Beckett's work as a life-affirming endeavour. Beckett's tragedies have been a contested philosophical space since the early 1960s when Adorno, and Cavell first interpreted *Endgame* by employing a number of divergent philosophical frameworks.[v] To date, thinkers working in the discipline of philosophy have, for the most part, counseled against understanding Beckettian tragedy as either an interpretation, or development, of pre-Nietzschean philosophical quietism.[vi]

There are presently two main interpretive approaches to the philosophical component of Beckett's published works. The first approach is to interpret the philosophical quietist aspects of the work as having an ultimately life-affirming intention. This approach to Beckett's work is found in the work of Cavell (2002), Deleuze (1995), and Badiou (2003). The second approach is to argue that Beckett's engagement with pre-Nietzschean thought is undertaken with the intention of parodying pre-Nietzschean philosophy's life-denying propensity. This approach is found in the interpretive work of Adorno (1991), and Critchley (1997).

In both of the life-affirming philosophical approaches to Beckett's work, the idea that Beckett's engagement with quietist thought, and pre-Nietzschean philosophical thought, might be undertaken for the purpose of promoting life-denial is perfunctorily dismissed. This dismissive approach to Beckett's pre-Nietzschean philosophical engagement permits Beckett's philosophical interpreters – namely Adorno, Cavell, Critchley, Deleuze, and Badiou – to incorporate Beckett's oeuvre into contemporary philosophical thought (Clement, 2006).

To date, in the field of philosophy, Beckett's oeuvre has been employed as a vehicle to communicate the ideas of other thinkers on matters such as the life-affirming nature of art, alterity, or openness to the 'Other', and the refusal to ascribe 'meaning' to existence as an anti-nihilist act. The issue of Beckett's incorporation into contemporary thought is not viewed as a problem for Beckettian interpretation.

In an essay in the collection *Beckett after Beckett*, Bruno Clement charts the history of Beckett's French philosophical reception, noting, at first, a certain 'ventriloquism' – that is, a tendency on the part of theorists to repeat Beckett's words, though in a critical discourse – followed by a tendency towards incorporation or 'deployment' (Weller, 2006: viii). As Clement states:

> Simplifying a good deal, one could say that we have passed, little by little, from a mimetic criticism, of the type practiced by Blanchot (and to which the work, in general, made one say about it if not what it wanted, at least what it said) to a philosophical criticism (that can give the impression of making Beckett's oeuvre do, sometimes against its expressed desires, exactly what the criticism desires that it do) (Clement, 2006: 120).

Clement argues that this is the fate of all great works, the very thing that ensures their on-going importance (Clement, 2006: 120-1). Following this line of argument, Clement puts forward the thesis that more recent incorporation by the likes of Badiou is acceptable *because* it tends to ignore the avowed philosophical references or sources actually found in Beckett's work – dismissed by Clement as employed more or less ironically by Beckett – and instead makes the author work 'against his expressed desires.' Clement finds this acceptable because, 'Deviation is the destiny of every oeuvre. We tend to forget it, but we know it well, fundamentally...' (Clement, 2006: 131).

One finds a similarly dismissive approach to Beckett's engagement with philosophical thought in the work of Simon Critchley. Critchley argues that 'Beckett's work contains innumerable philosophical red herrings' (Critchley, 1997: 144). We are therefore encouraged to discount Beckett's philosophical inheritance, and to eschew any interpretive work that attempts to understand Beckett's work in reference to that inheritance:

> Beckett's work seems to offer itself generously to philosophical interpretation only to withdraw the offer by parodically reducing such interpretation to ridicule (Critchley, 1997: 143).

This kind of incorporation, when the avowed interests of the author are dismissed in preference for those of the interpreter, is not therefore restricted to French philosophical thought. One also finds this phenomenon in German philosophy (Adorno), and in the work of American (Cavell) and British (Critchley) philosophers. Here we see a similar tendency to assimilate Beckett's work into contemporary thought, and to recuperate Beckett's work by presenting his overt negativity as something implicitly affirmative, so that, in turn, we are presented with the anti-capitalist Marxist Beckett, the Wittgensteinian Beckett of the 'Ordinary', and the Post-Nietzschean, Heideggerian Beckett of the 'Everyday'. The

most recent philosophical approach to Beckettian art, that undertaken by Alain Badiou, similarly presents Beckett as an exemplar of contemporary thought. The Badiouian Beckett is an artist whose work ensures that the 'Event' of the Other's recognition is kept alive by ensuring that all is done to prepare for the (possible) arrival of that Other (Badiou, 2003: 4, 73).

Thus the history of philosophical interpretation of Beckett's work is a history of bringing the most fashionable readings – for which Beckett seems to have cared little[vii] – to the work of a most unfashionable philosophical reader (Feldman, 2006, 2010).

With regard to the work of thinkers such as Adorno, Cavell, Deleuze, and Critchley, the tendency to dismiss the life-denying, pre-Nietzschean, philosophical aspects of Beckett's published works is somewhat understandable when one takes into account the prevailing philosophical position on the life affirming nature of art, combined with the paucity of Beckettian archival and biographical material available to researchers when these interpretive works were written. More troubling is the tendency of later life-affirming philosophical interpretation of Beckett's work – such as that undertaken by Badiou (2003) – to ignore the archival, and biographical material – along with its implications for the quietist content of the published works – and instead to continue to interpret Beckett's oeuvre in the light of the interpreter's own political and philosophical concerns.

What philosophy has consistently done, and continues to do, is to do what it argues should not be done (Adorno, 1973: 6; Critchley, 1997: 141-47; Derrida, 1992: 61), which is to understand the work of one thinker – an ascetic thinker interested in pre-Nietzschean thought – through the lens of other thinkers, such as the affirmative thought espoused in post-structuralism – where it is argued that 'It's better that there be a future, rather than nothing' (Derrida, cited by Weller, 2006: 14) – and Nietzschean aesthetics – where the purpose of art is the '*deification of existence*' (Nietzsche, 1968: 434).

The interpretive problem that this dismissive approach to Beckett's pre-Nietzschean philosophical inheritance generates is perhaps most obvious when one finds other disciplines – such as English, and comparative literature – that draw upon post-Nietzschean philosophical thought for their interpretive frameworks, then attempt to make sense of the quietist 'Beckett' that emerges from archival material through a life-affirming philosophical lens. The limitations and preoccupations of the philosophical discourse impinge upon the understanding of Beckett's development of quietism in the disciplines of literature, and comparative literature. As such, Beckett is either portrayed as a thinker who is unable to take quietism entirely seriously (Ackerley, 2004), or as an artist whose work depicts the failure of longed-for negation (Rosen, 1976: 27, 160; Weller, 2005). In short Beckett's quietism is perceived in relation to the two main interpretive approaches that the discipline of philosophy has employed in relation to the philosophical component of Beckett's works, namely that Beckett's negativity ultimately has a life-affirming intent, or that Beckett engages with philosophy for the purpose of parody. Though acknowledging Beckett's engagement with Schopenhauer, the overriding tendency is to want to deny the possibility that Beckett endorses Schopenhauer's assertion of one's ability to attain the state of nothingness through the practice of quietism (see Weller, 2005: 81-96).[viii]

In view of the biographical and archival material which has come to light over the past twenty years – material which provides a significant challenge to both the parodic, and life–affirming reading of Beckett's work – it is incumbent upon the discipline of philosophy to re-evaluate its present, dismissive position on Beckett's engagement with pre-Nietzschean philosophy, quietism, and – given the extent of Beckett's engagement – Schopenhauerian philosophical quietism in particular. Summarizing this imperative, Peter Boxall states:

> We are now entering into a period in the reception of Beckett in which a new set of possibilities for the articulation of Beckett's negativity are

> beginning to make themselves felt. This new period or phase, I would argue, is one that is enabled by a growing awareness both of Beckett's debts and his legacies, and one that is informed by a much stronger and deeper body of knowledge than was previously available both about the ways in which Beckett's thinking interacts with a number of traditions that he inherits, and about the ways in which those who come under his influence interact with the legacies that he passes on (Boxall, 2010: 35).

To claim that Beckett reduces philosophy to cultural trash (Adorno, 1991: 241), or provides pre-Nietzschean philosophical reference points merely for the purpose of making a fool of anyone who attempts to pursue their import (Critchley, 1997: 144) simply fails to do justice to the scale of Beckett's philosophical investigation.[ix]

With these interpretive issues in mind, this thesis poses two broad questions. The first question relates to Beckett's work: what in Beckett's middle-period tragedies has the discipline of philosophy overlooked as a result of its present interpretive method? What emerges once one removes the life-affirming interpretive lens that has been used to interpret Beckett's engagement with Schopenhauerian life-denial? The second question relates to Schopenhauer's work: what do Beckett's middle-period tragedies have to tell us about Schopenhauerian thought? What is there to be gained by positioning Beckett as Schopenhauer's interlocutor, and not Schopenhauer's critic?

Rationale for the choice of the three tragedies, *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*, and *Happy Days*

As previously stated in this introduction, the tragic works of Samuel Beckett have been a space of philosophical contestation for more than fifty years. Of all of Beckett's theatrical works, *Endgame* has received the most philosophical analysis.

Indeed the play *Endgame* was the focus of much of the early, influential philosophical interpretation of Beckett's work. Adorno's interpretation of *Endgame* as an evocation of the failure of nihilism (Adorno, 1973: 381) has been particularly influential in the later interpretive work of thinkers working in the fields of English (for example, Boxall (2010)) and comparative literature (for example, Weller (2005)). The early interpretive work of Adorno and Cavell has also been further developed in the later philosophical interpretation of Beckett's work undertaken by Critchley (1997).

To provide a challenge to the life-affirming understanding of Beckettian tragedy, one must provide a challenge to a number of the assumptions that one finds in the philosophical reading of *Endgame*. Given what is now known about Beckett's lifelong engagement with Schopenhauerian thought, I believe it is important to provide a significant retort to Adorno's dismissive reading of *Endgame* as 'a homely version of Schopenhauer's negation of the will to life' (Adorno, 1991: 269).

The decision to incorporate a reading *Waiting for Godot* into the thesis was influenced by a number of factors, most notably a comment made by Beckett himself that connects *Waiting for Godot* to *Endgame*: 'You must realise that Hamm and Clov are Didi and Gogo at a later date, at the end of their lives...' (Worton, 1994: 67). To take a claim like this literally would do a disservice to its figurative intent. However, Beckett's enigmatic comment does suggest that *Waiting for Godot* is in some way a precursor to *Endgame*, and that understanding the subject matter of the later play depends upon understanding the subject matter of the earlier work, and vice versa. That the dominant philosophical interpretations of Beckett's tragedies have, to date, sought to understand *Endgame* in isolation suggests an interpretive flaw, which this thesis seeks to correct.

Finally, *Happy Days* is explored because of it is contemporaneousness to the other works under consideration, and its ongoing utilization of particular structural elements, notably the model of the antagonistic pseudocouple,[x] and the overt

practice of 'traditional' asceticism. This reading of *Happy Days* in conjunction with *Waiting for Godot*, and *Endgame* further develops the idea of the interconnectedness of the works of Beckett's middle-period.[xi] As such, the reading of the plays that is undertaken here applies a consistent interpretive framework from one play to the next. This method enables a view of Beckett's work which the interpretation of one play in isolation cannot.

Chapters in the Thesis

This thesis is divided into four parts, summarised as follows.

Part One 'Introduction and Literature Review' (Chapters 1 and 2) establishes the context of the study and outlines the rationale for its argument and method. Here existing approaches to Beckett's work, as found in the literature from a number of disciplines, are reviewed. Chapter 2 specifically focuses on the three central claims of Beckettian philosophical interpretation found in the secondary literature, namely the life-affirming role of art, the absence of meaning as an anti-nihilistic endeavour, and the affirmation of difference through the acknowledgement of the 'Other'.

Part Two of the thesis (Chapters 3 and 4) explores the life-denying role of art in Schopenhauerian and Beckettian thought. Chapter 3, 'Schopenhauerian Aesthetics' sets out the key features of Schopenhauerian aesthetic theory. In this chapter I describe the way Schopenhauer differentiates between 'ordinary', willful, consciousness, and the aesthetic state. Further to this, I discuss the role of art in Schopenhauerian aesthetics, paying close attention to the role of tragedy. In Chapter 3 I argue that Schopenhauer's theory of tragedy as an art form that presents the spectator with an affective experience that is analogous to the dynamically sublime is vital for our understanding of Beckett's middle-period

tragedies. In witnessing the tragic performance the spectator becomes aware of his or her negative freedom to deny the individual will, and his or her ability to present the will with knowledge that is a disincentive for further action. Beckett reinforces this process by also making the dynamically sublime the subject matter of the tragic performance. Beckettian tragedy thus employs the dynamically sublime on two levels.

In Chapter 4, 'Beckettian Aesthetics', I present the argument that Beckett's middle-period tragedies appear to engage with Schopenhauer's aesthetic theory *and* Schopenhauer's understanding of the role of tragedy, namely the promotion of resignationism. This chapter sets out Beckettian aesthetics in detail, from the early critical manifestation in *Proust,* to the later, artistically presented aesthetics found in *Waiting for Godot, Endgame,* and *Happy Days.* In this chapter I discuss Beckett's conception of 'ordinary' and 'aesthetic' consciousness, and the connection between these two states and the two types of memory – 'voluntary' and 'involuntary' memory – that one encounters in Beckett's middle-period tragedies. In the Beckettian aesthetic state the intellect presents the will with an involuntary memory of suffering. This unwanted knowledge – of the pain one has caused, or endured – is presented by the intellect to the will with the intention of promoting the will's resignation.

In Part Three (Chapters 5 and 6) of the thesis I discuss Schopenhauerian and Beckettian ontology and epistemology. At the heart of Beckett's engagement with Schopenhauerian thought is Beckett's 'pseudocouple'. It is in Beckett's theatrical pseudocouples that one finds Beckett's ontology and epistemology. It is an ontology and epistemology that is greatly informed by Schopenhauer's work in these fields.

In Schopenhauerian thought human beings are a somewhat miraculous combination of bodily drives and intellectual knowledge (WWR 1: 102). The body is blind will, which drives us on from one urge to the next (WWR 1: 164, 180). The

intellect exists solely to provide knowledge to the will, so that its constant striving may be provided with direction, or a temporary aim (WWR 2: 278). The 'I' of the Schopenhauerian self is the meeting point of these two aspects of the self, the meeting point of the *subject of willing* and the *subject of knowing* (WWR 2: 203). Fundamentally it is a relationship of drive and response, repeated *ad infinitum.*

Beckett's tragic pseudocouples can be understood as a sustained engagement with Schopenhauer's ontological and epistemological understanding of the 'I' as an entity which possesses aspects of willing and knowing, or bodily drives and intellect.

In Chapter 5, 'Ontology: the Subject of Willing', I set out Schopenhauerian ontology, and the pertinent aspects of the highest grade of the Schopenhauerian 'will-to-life', namely human beings. Having established this ontological framework, I then argue that the Schopenhauerian will-to-life appears to provide an important philosophical foundation to Beckett's ontology, the 'will not to suffer' (Beckett, 1999: 43). In *Waiting for Godot, Endgame*, and *Happy Days*, Beckett consistently utilizes key features of the Schopenhauerian willing subject in his tragic depiction of the 'will not to suffer', namely Vladimir, Pozzo, Hamm, Nagg, Winnie, and Mr Shower.

Chapter 5 thus presents a challenge to the present philosophical understanding of Beckett's work as an oeuvre that affirms existence because it is either free from nihilistic metaphysical meaning (Adorno, 1991), or seeks to be free from metaphysical meaning (Cavell, 2002; Deleuze, 1995; Critchley, 1997) so that life may then be affirmed. In contrast to this dominant, affirmative, line of interpretation, I argue that the early manifestation of Beckett's ontology that one finds in the critical work, *Proust*, namely that of Beckett's 'will not to suffer', is later manifested in the ascetic tragedies of Beckett's middle period. The Beckettian 'will not to suffer' can be understood as *the* problem of Beckettian asceticism. The 'will

not to suffer's' resignation, or life denial, and the state of 'nothingness' that follows the will's resignation is the objective of the Beckettian ascetic intellect.

In Chapter 6, 'Epistemology – The Subject of Knowing', I discuss the key aspects of Schopenhauerian epistemology, and explore Beckett's apparent utilization of Schopenhauerian thought with regard to the way the Beckettian intellect functions. In the ascetic tragedies of Beckett's middle period, Beckett's intellectual characters – Estragon, Lucky, Clov, Nell, Willie and Mrs Shower – possess many of the essential representational capacities of the Schopenhauerian 'servant' of the will (WWR 2: 216), namely the ability to generate representational and conceptual knowledge which is situated in space and time.

Finally in Part Three (Chapters 7, 8, 9, and 10) of the thesis, I explore Beckett's development of asceticism as ethical practice. Having presented the argument that Beckett's theatre of asceticism appears to be comprised of Schopenhauerian informed pseudocouples, in this part of the thesis I discuss the nature of the relationship that exists between the two aspects of the Beckettian self. The relationship that exists between Beckett's theatrical 'wills not to suffer' and each of their respective 'intellects' is a hostile relationship, a relationship of 'warring opposites' (Weller, 2005: 151). The *tactics* of the 'war' that we witness on Beckett's stage are the tactics of demand and refusal. On one side the willing subject demands the provision of information from the knowing subject, and on the other side, the knowing subject refuses to furnish the willing subject with actionable representations.

In Chapter 7, 'Schopenhauerian Ethics – Asceticism', I discuss Schopenhauer's understanding of asceticism as a practical means to ensure that an already quieted will remains quieted. I also describe the various methods by which the Schopenhauerian ascetic deprives his or her will of the means to strive, methods such as poverty, celibacy, and self-mortification. Chapter 7 also establishes Beckett's understanding of 'nothing'. 'Nothing', the state one experiences once the

will resigns from life, is presented in this chapter as *the* goal of the Beckettian ascetic intellect. Beckettian nothingness, I argue, appears to build upon Schopenhauer's conception of nothingness as an attainable, though ultimately unrepresentable, state of being. In Beckett's middle-period tragedies a number of ascetic intellects are successful in their attempts to break the will-not-to-suffer. I believe a number of Beckett's interpreter's claims regarding the open-endedness of Beckettian tragic endings can be called into question by reading Beckett's depiction of having successfully broken one's will in the light of Schopenhauer's claim that one can only depict the state of 'nothingness' in negative terms, that is, as one's lacking some attribute one once possessed. Beckett consistently presents the attained state of nothingness in two ways: through the willing subject's loss of sight, and the knowing subject's inability to respond.

In Chapters 8 and 9, in which I discuss the various ascetic methods that Beckett's intellectual characters employ, I analyse Beckett's contribution to the development of ascetic thought. Whereas the Schopenhauerian ascetic focuses his or her efforts on depriving the body of the means to strive, the Beckettian intellect also deprives the will-not-to-suffer of knowledge. By refusing to present the will with an actionable representation or 'motive', the Beckettian intellect deprives the will of the information it needs to strive. It is a central claim of this thesis that Beckett's middle-period tragedies evince a unique ascetic utilization of the human capacity to reason. It is the ephectic quality of reason, namely the ability to prevaricate, and to *suspend judgement,* which the Beckettian tragic intellect uses to great effect in its attempts to deny the will knowledge that permits it to strive.

In Chapters 8 and 9 I explore the Beckettian intellect's utilization of memory as an integral aspect of a unique ascetic method: whilst refusing to present the will-not-to-suffer with an actionable representation, the knowing subject instead generates 'involuntary' memories of suffering in its attempts to break the will. In addition to this, I describe Beckett's original employment of ascetic practice, not as a means of maintaining an already broken will, but as a means of breaking the will in the first instance. In contrast to the *ex post facto* nature of Schopenhauerian asceticism,

Beckett presents asceticism as an *ex-ante* means of encouraging the will to freely choose to extinguish itself.

Finally, in Chapter 10, 'Schopenhauerian Suicide and Beckettian Suicidal Contemplation', I interpret the oft-repeated, though under-explored, motif of suicidal contemplation in Beckett's tragedies in the light of Schopenhauer's understanding of suicide as confirmation of the illusion of individuality. In Chapter 10 I discuss the last-ditch tactic that the long-suffering willing subject employs in an attempt to alleviate its own distress, namely to demand, or provoke the provision of suicide as a motive. For both Schopenhauer and Beckett, I argue, the thought of suicide is the ultimate act of egoism. In the act of contemplating suicide, whereby one prioritises one's own distress, the intellect precludes the willing subject from gaining awareness of the universality, or ubiquity of suffering. Building upon Schopenhauer's understanding of the *act* of suicide, Beckett's theatre of asceticism presents the *contemplation* of suicide as *the* main stumbling block for the ascetic practitioner in his or her attempts to break the will-not-to-suffer.

With this broad outline of the thesis in place, I now turn to a review of the secondary philosophical literature on the subject of Beckettian art.

Chapter 2: Literature Review: Affirmation of Existence, Meaninglessness, and Alterity

There are three premises that fundamentally shape the present understanding of Beckett's tragedies in the field of philosophy. The first premise relates to the role of art: through its confrontation with the negative, art affirms existence. The second premise, which is both supported by, and in turn supports and builds upon, the first premise, is that the import of Beckett's art is its refusal to give in to 'nihilism', where nihilism is understood as the attribution of 'meaning' to existence. Beckett's work has consistently been read in this light:

> Time and again, since Adorno's interventions... Beckett's works have been deployed in the struggle against nihilism (with nihilism being taken not as a deviation from, but, following Nietzsche, as a synonym for metaphysics). In Blanchot, in Cavell, in Deleuze, in Derrida, in Cixous, and most recently in Badiou and Critchley, Beckett is championed for having articulated an affirmation that is taken, at least by Blanchot and Derrida, to lie beyond the very opposition of affirmation and negation within metaphysical thinking ... (Weller, 2005: 15).

And the third premise, one again supported by, and which in turn supports and builds upon the premise that Beckettian tragedy is life affirming, is the premise that Beckett's art implicitly, and explicitly, promotes the recognition of difference, or recognition of the 'Other'.

The first premise of the philosophical interpretation of Beckett's work – that the role of art is to affirm life – is an implicit utilisation, and thus affirmation, of Nietzschean aesthetics; 'implicit', for at no point is Nietzsche's understanding of

the role of art defended, rather the affirmative, or justificatory role of art is taken for, and presented as, a philosophical given. The interpretive starting point for the consideration of Beckett's tragedies invariably begins at Nietzsche, or, as one might alternatively understand it, *after* Schopenhauer. It is from the Nietzschean understanding of the role of art that Beckettian tragedy is now considered:

> [Through art], 'life is made both possible and worth living' (Nietzsche, 1993: 16).

> 'Art is essentially *affirmation, blessing, deification of existence*... Schopenhauer is *wrong* when he says that certain works of art serve pessimism. Tragedy does *not* teach "resignation" — To represent terrible and questionable things is in itself an instinct for power and magnificence in the artist... Art affirms...' (Nietzsche, 1968: 434-5)

The question that philosophers tend to ask, then, is not 'Does Beckett's art make life both possible and worth living?' That question has already been answered in the affirmative: 'All of Beckett's genius tends towards affirmation' (Badiou, 2003: 44). Rather, the question one is encouraged to provide an answer to is this: 'How does the artwork of Samuel Beckett affirm existence?' By both asking and answering this question in the way it does, philosophy positions Beckett's tragedies as twentieth century manifestations of ancient Greek tragedy as interpreted by Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy*. Much like the tragedies of ancient Greece, Beckett's tragedies are said to evince a 'craving for ugliness ... for the image of everything terrible... destructive and deadly underlying existence...' (Nietzsche, 1993: 6) because like the ancient Greeks, Beckett has the 'strength for tragedy, for pessimism' (Nietzsche, 1993: 7, 3), where the worst that life has to offer is confronted and assimilated into one's understanding of existence.

In the following review of the philosophical literature on Beckett's work I present the various ways that philosophy answers the question of how it is that Beckett's art affirms existence. This literature review starts with a rehearsal of the literature that endorses the second premise: Beckett's tragic works are life affirming because they refuse to attribute meaning to existence.

Meaninglessness

> What seemed to be required was a critical or elucidatory language that could somehow interpret the plays' uninterpretability, that could cast light on the plays' meaninglessness in ways that made it appear meaningful, without reconstructing the very critical and dramatic conventions whose denial constituted their meaning. The struggle to create such a language – to preserve the impact of the plays' meaninglessness whilst exploring what such meaninglessness might mean – has characterised the development of Beckett studies over the last five decades (Boxall, 2010: 6).

That we speak about 'meaninglessness' in relation to the tragic works of Samuel Beckett is due in large part to the early interpretive work of Martin Esslin (1961), Theodor W. Adorno (1991, first published 1961), and Stanley Cavell (2002, first published 1964). This line of argument is again pursued in the later interpretive work of Simon Critchley (1997). Beckett's philosophical interpreters argue two broad lines of thought in regard to Beckett's meaninglessness: that in the world of Beckettian theatre meaninglessness is either presented as a fact of life, or a goal, which, through one's actions, one must purposively engender.

Falling within the first school of thought – meaninglessness as a fact – Esslin argues that in Beckett's tragic works language is used to depict the determined

'disintegration of language' where the denial of certainty also withholds a definite meaning (Esslin, 1961: 63). Similarly, Adorno argues that the absence of foundational metaphysical meaning precludes meaning in the content of the work:

> Because there is no longer any metaphysical meaning, there can be no meaning in the words we use to communicate. Thus there can no longer be communication (Adorno, 1991: 263).

In contrast to this line of thought, and therefore falling within the second school of thought – meaninglessness as a goal – Cavell suggests that the content of Beckett's work is not meaningless. Far from evincing meaninglessness, Beckett's language depicts the burden of meaning, which, through the genre of tragedy, Beckett seeks to cast off (Cavell, 2002:116-7).

Whilst there is some disagreement, then, amongst Beckett's interpreters regarding the ability to ascribe meaning to the content of one of Beckett's tragedies, it is, however, for the most part argued that Beckettian tragedy either manifests the absence of nihilistic metaphysical meaning, or the need for the removal of nihilistic metaphysical meaning from the world. It is this line of argument in the secondary literature that I pursue here.[xii]

Meaninglessness as a fact

Martin Esslin's early liberal humanist reading of Beckettian theatre presents Beckett as a playwright concerned with an attitude that is comparable to Sartrean 'bad faith':

> The hope of salvation may be merely an evasion of the suffering and anguish that spring from facing the reality of the human condition (Esslin, 1961: 46).

Esslin's reading positions Beckett, much like Sartre and Camus, as an artist whose work confronts the absurdity of human existence in a godless universe. However, unlike Sartre, and Camus whose works convey the absurdity of existence as a message, whilst employing traditional formal aspects such as logic and reason to convey absurd content, Beckett's work is described as an example of the Theatre of the Absurd:

> While Sartre or Camus express the new content in the old convention, the Theatre of the Absurd goes a step further in trying to achieve a unity between its basic assumptions and the form in which these are expressed (Esslin, 1961: 17).

No longer is absurd content presented in a rationally argued form, rather in Beckettian tragedy absurdity is presented 'in terms of concrete stage images,' thus 'openly abandoning rational devices and discursive thought' (Esslin, 1961: 17-18).

However, despite the absurdity of both the formal and dialogic elements, the continued use of language suggests an attempt by the author to communicate a message, even if this is to 'communicate the incommunicable' (Esslin, 1961: 64). Though any interpreter must be cautious, he or she is still able to isolate images and themes and to discern their structural groundwork, and by so doing, 'make it easier to follow the author's intention and to see, if not the *answers*, at least the *questions* that he is asking' (Esslin, 1961: 33). For Esslin, then, Beckett's tragic works depict something comparable to the existential brute fact of our *being there* 'after the collapse of metaphysical meaning structures' (Boxall, 2000: 24). For Esslin, Beckettian tragedy assures us that we live in a universe without meaning,

and belief in a beyond, or indeed waiting for salvation of any kind, is revealed as 'essentially absurd' (Esslin, 1961: 42).

For Adorno, Beckett's work issues a condemnation of philosophical thought – such as existentialism – which attempts to make something meaningful out of meaninglessness (Adorno, 1991; 251, 249; Critchley, 1997: 148-9). In contrast to Esslin's position, Adorno views the attribution of meaning to modern works of art (such as Beckettian tragedy) as missing the very point of the message they seek to convey: namely that the search for, and attribution of 'meaning' is *the* problem, for it lies at the heart of nihilism (Adorno, 1973: 380). Rather than attempting to ascribe meaning to life, modern artists such as Beckett have passed judgment on meaning as the principal negator of life. For Adorno, nihilism is the act or desire to 'overcome' that which is. The attempt to overcome nihilism only leads to the perpetuation of nihilism, indeed *is* nihilism (Weller, 2005: 12-13).

In Beckettian tragedy, Adorno finds the type of relentless engagement, or confrontation, with nihilism that allows for the only hope for the future. In *Endgame,* it is Beckett's submission to the negative, followed by the subsequent failure of nihilism that permits Adorno to see Beckett as an anti-nihilist artist, as one who allows for the only permissible form of hope, that which is found *within* the negative itself. This, then, forms the basis to Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*: out of nihilism's failed attempts to overcome emerges 'a haven of hope' for a better, 'reconciled' world (Adorno, 1973: 381). In Beckett's tragedies Adorno reads a profound acceptance of life as it is, that there is no overcoming, no other realm to cross over to. True 'reconciliation', then, is when one relinquishes the desire to overcome, and in turn the non-identical is freed from totalizing oppression (Weller, 2005: 14 in reference to Adorno, 1973: 6).

For Adorno, the role of any theorist when tasked with the interpretation of a modern work of art such as *Endgame* is to 'concretely construct the fact that it [*Endgame*] has no meaning' (Adorno, 1991: 243). This, then, is not a matter of

simply replacing meaning with meaninglessness, as Adorno believes existentialist thinkers have done:

> Drama cannot simply take negative meaning, or the absence of meaning as its content without everything peculiar to it being affected to the point of turning into its opposite. The essence of drama was constituted by that meaning ... one cannot speak of meaninglessness because this fact cannot be conveyed ... language exists to convey meaning (Adorno, 1991: 242).

In the form of Beckettian tragedy, Adorno sees a fundamental challenge to language, and more specifically to art, the content of which has traditionally sought to convey a message. Adorno interprets *Endgame* as a play that undermines the traditional view of 'meaning' in art. Adorno divides this traditional understanding into three component parts. The first of these parts or elements is the 'metaphysical' meaning of the play, which Adorno defines as the 'metaphysical content that is represented objectively in the complexion of the artifact'. The second element is the overall intention of the work as a 'complex of meaning', the 'inherent meaning of the play'. And, finally, the third element is the dialogic meaning, the meaning that comes about through the sequence of sentences (Adorno, 1991: 242.) The significance of Beckett's work for Adorno is that it undermines the idea of meaning from its philosophical foundations. By undermining the metaphysical meaning – by reducing philosophy to mere 'cultural trash' (Adorno, 1991: 241) – *Endgame* also undermines the other two types of dramatic meaning. *All* meaning collapses (Adorno, 1991: 263). Thus on Beckett's stage we bear witness to 'the fact that there is no longer any substantive, affirmative metaphysical meaning that could provide dramatic form with its law and its epiphany. That ... disrupts dramatic form down to its linguistic infrastructure' (Adorno, 1991: 242).

Meaninglessness as a task

In the work of Stanley Cavell one observes a post-Nietzschean understanding of Beckettian tragedy, that is, the problem of the work is the attribution of meaning to existence. However, this diagnosis is then followed by a Nietzschean solution to the stated problem: one must overcome meaning.[xiii]

Writing some three years after the publication of Adorno and Esslin's first proclamations of Beckett's formal meaninglessness, Cavell puts forward the theory that *Endgame* is a play about a world suffocating under the weight of meaning, i.e. meaning is a problem because of its proliferation:

> The discovery of *Endgame*, both in topic and technique, is not the failure of meaning (if that means the lack of meaning) but its total, even totalitarian, success—our inability *not* to mean what we are given to mean (Cavell, 2002:116-7).

Thus, once again, meaninglessness is the 'message' of *Endgame*. However, in the interpretive work of Cavell, meaninglessness is no longer a given but, rather, an unending 'task' (Cavell, 2002: 150), the ultimate goal of which is a life that is not judged unworthy of being lived by those who live it.

The other key difference between the Cavellian reading and the Adornian reading of Beckettian tragedy – one that partially aligns the work of Cavell and Esslin – is the claim that the content of the play is as important as its form for conveying the message of meaninglessness (Cavell, 2002: 115). One also finds later support for this view in the work of Martha Nussbaum. In 'Narrative Emotions: Beckett's Genealogy of Love', Nussbaum describes the relationship of form and content as 'inseparable'. Just as one cannot overlook the form of an artwork, any study of

literature that attempts to understand the work through its form alone is held to be 'seriously incomplete' (Nussbaum, 1990: 290-1). With this in mind, Cavell begins his essay on *Endgame*, 'Ending the Waiting Game', by attributing significance to the play's content:

> Various keys to its interpretation are in place: 'Endgame' is a term of chess; the name Hamm is shared by Noah's cursed son, it titles a kind of actor, it starts recalling Hamlet. But no interpretation I have seen details the textual evidence for these relations or shows how the play's meaning opens with them (Cavell, 2002: 115).

Cavell argues that these details assist us to answer the questions that the play raises, namely:

> Who are these people? Where are they, and how did they get there? What can illuminate their mood of bewilderment as well as their mood of appalling comprehension? What is the source of their ugly power over one another, and of their impotence? What gives to their conversation its sound, at once of madness and of plainness? (Cavell, 2002: 117).

For Cavell, the textual references, the location in between water and land, the name of one of the central characters, 'Hamm', the negation that takes place throughout the play, help us to understand the intention of the work. *Endgame* takes place after the Flood of the Old Testament. The negation of the play is an attempted undoing of the curse that has befallen both Hamm and humankind, an attempted unraveling of meaning that has made life unbearable. And, given this:

> Solitude, emptiness, nothingness, meaninglessness, silence – these are not the givens of Beckett's characters, but their goal, their new heroic

undertaking . . . These states are, rather, 'infinite tasks' (Cavell, 2002: 156).

The position that Cavell takes on *Endgame* is a significant one, then, because it provides an important philosophical counterweight to the reading given by Adorno. Cavell is alive to the way that the content provides a basis for the rationale of the negation: the negated content assists us to understand why negation is sought, and the reasons it is being sought in a particular way.

Together, these two aspects – form and content – provide an explanation for Hamm's psychology and *Endgame's* progression:

> The end Hamm seeks must be shown in the efforts made throughout the play. What are these efforts? Take these:
>
> 1. To play out a game, or drama, to a conclusion.
> 2. To finish a story.
> 3. To secure fruitlessness, and in particular:
> 4. To defeat meaning, of word and deed.

The success of which will result in 'human existence at last' (Cavell, 2002: 148; 149). Thus Cavell argues that the intention of Hamm's attempts to overcome meaning is to make life livable.[xiv]

In this approach to *Endgame*, Weller sees a decidedly Nietzschean undertaking:

> with its emphasis on the heroic, the choice that Hamm faces in *Endgame* is a decidedly Nietzschean one: 'either nihilism or else the task of

> purposely undoing, re-evaluating all the purposes we have known, re-locating the gravity of purpose itself' (Weller, 2005: 132 citing Cavell 2002: 150).

These are the answers, then, that Cavell provides to the questions that he believes are raised by Beckett's work. However, it is the very fact that Cavell seeks to answer these questions that then provides the basis to Simon Critchley's critique of early Beckettian interpretation.

Though admiring the extent to which Adorno has appreciated the difficulties of interpreting Beckett and 'taken up the challenge' that this poses for philosophy (Critchley, 1997: 147), Critchley's own interpretation of Beckett's work is, however, more closely aligned to the argument presented by Cavell: meaninglessness is not a given, it is an *achievement* (Critchley, 1997: 152):

> Thus it is not true to say that Beckett's work is meaningless as if meaninglessness were a fact that did not need to be conceptually communicated; rather it is a question of establishing the meaning of *meaninglessness*, making a meaning out of the refusal of meaning that the work performs without that refusal of meaning becoming a meaning. It is a question of conceptualizing and communicating that which resists conceptualization and refuses communication – a necessary and impossible task (Critchley, 1997: 151).

Whilst criticising Cavell for 'overshooting' the text in his 'ordinary language reading' of Beckett's play, and attempting to establish the meaning of *Endgame* (Critchley, 1997: 177), (something that is prohibited if one accepts, as Critchley does, Adorno's understanding of modern art), Critchley does approve of Cavell's assertion regarding the importance of unburdening the everyday of all its deadening meaning. So when Cavell states that, 'Solitude, emptiness, nothingness,

meaninglessness, silence' – are the goals of Beckett's characters (Cavell, 2002: 156), Critchley interprets this quote to mean:

> Beckett is not telling us that the universe is meaningless, rather that meaninglessness is a task, an achievement, the achievement of the ordinary or the everyday (Critchley, 1997: 179).

In agreement with Cavell, Critchley understands Beckett's art as an attempt to 'declutter the world' so that humankind might 'once again appreciate its ordinariness', for it is the inability to see what 'is' that renders us in need of 'salvific narratives' (Critchley, 1997: 179).[xv] Thus, according to Critchley, and in line with preceding thinkers on this matter, Beckett is not a nihilistic thinker:

> The stalest of all stale philosophical clichés in terms of which Beckett's work has been interpreted is the claim that it celebrates the meaninglessness of existence and is therefore nihilistic (Critchley, 1997: 176).

Rather, Beckett is an artist who questions meaning, and by doing so potentially places us in a position where we will no longer despair for the failure of the meaning we have ascribed. In turn we will no longer seek deliverance from, but, rather, better appreciate the here and now by seeing it not as something from which we can or need to be saved. To quote Critchley:

> What passes for the ordinary is cluttered with illusory narratives of redemption that conceal the very extraordinariness of the ordinary and the nature of its decay under conditions of nihilism (Critchley, 1997: 179).

Beckett the metaphysician

In the work of Ulrich Pothast (2008) we witness the first philosophical acknowledgement, and exploration, of Beckett's metaphysics. Thus in the form of Pothast's work we observe a challenge to the assertion of Beckett's metaphysical meaninglessness. The work of Ulrich Pothast is also the first philosophical attempt to understand Beckett's oeuvre in the light of Beckett's now well documented engagement with the work of Arthur Schopenhauer. Indeed, Pothast's work is, to date, the only book-length work to focus solely on the Schopenhauer-Beckett nexus. As the title of Pothast's work, *The Metaphysical Vision*, suggests, Pothast traces the influence of Schopenhauerian aesthetics, ontology, and epistemology on Beckett's literary criticism, prose and drama.

It is generally acknowledged that Beckett's early critical work, *Proust*, is greatly influenced by Schopenhauerian aesthetics (see, for example, Rosen, 1976: 145-6; Wood, 1994: 4; Pothast, 2008: 4; Acheson, 1978; Murphy, 1994; Feldman, 2010). Endorsing this position, Pothast states that Beckett reads Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* as a 'metaphysical venture undertaken by the means of an artist, not a philosopher. Beckett arrives at this interpretation by taking central theses from Schopenhauer's aesthetics and using them in his own way, i.e., using them as the starting point for developing his own philosophical ideas on the metaphysics of art' (Pothast, 2008: 4). However, Pothast then significantly extends the influence of Schopenhauerian aesthetics to include Beckett's artistic output:

> My thesis concerning Beckett's literary work is that very important parts of this work can still be seen as representing a metaphysical vision of human life and the world we have to live in. The contents of this metaphysical vision show amazing similarities with the contents of Schopenhauer's metaphysical view of life and world, notwithstanding that important elements of the theoretical as well as aesthetic

> framework of Schopenhauer's philosophy were left behind by Beckett very soon after having used them for his own purposes in *Proust* (Pothast, 2008: 5-6; see also 27).

According to Pothast, at the heart of the Beckettian metaphysical vision is the Schopenhauerian idea that, unlike philosophy, art can get at reality (Pothast, 2008: 3). Thus Pothast is alive to the fact that for Beckett 'there exists a difference between the phenomenal surface of the world and the true reality beyond' (Pothast, 2008: 95-6). Whereas Schopenhauer views the phenomenal realm as an illusion (WWR 1: 353, 379), Beckett presents it as a 'caricature' (Pothast, 2008: 123-4 citing Beckett, 1999: 14). And, as is also the case in Schopenhauerian thought, in Beckettian thought one sees beyond the illusion, or caricature of space, time, and causality (Schopenhauer: WWR 1: 129-130; Beckett, 1999: 75, 79) when one perceives the world aesthetically. In the aesthetic state, one sees the Idea (Schopenhauer), or the 'ideal object' (Beckett) (Pothast, 2008: 97). Whereas, for Schopenhauer the Platonic Ideas are different grades of the will's objectification – the eternal forms of things – not themselves entering into time and space – (WWR 1: 129-3), for Beckett, Pothast argues, the ideal object is, rather, the 'total past sensation' of an event (Beckett, 1999: 72-3) (Pothast, 2008: 127). The Beckettian Idea, then, is no longer about archetypes, but about 'representing the non-empirical, undistorted, integral truth of a living person's experience in his or her world' (Pothast, 2008: 128).

Pothast's work is important, then, for a number of reasons. Firstly, Pothast is the first philosophical thinker to thoroughly acknowledge, and interpret, the Schopenhauerian epistemology and ontology that one finds in Beckett's early critical work. In addition to this, Pothast then traces Beckett's on-going artistic utilization and development of Schopenhauerian thought. Based upon biographical, archival, and textual evidence, Pothast contends that the influence of Schopenhauerian philosophy continues into Beckett's prose and tragedy. Secondly, Pothast's use of archival material permits him to trace a genetic philosophical basis to Beckett's ideas regarding the role of art, namely to provide the spectator with

the aesthetic moment, which in Beckett's case is when one experiences the 'integral truth of a person's existence' or the 'suffering of being' (Beckett, 1999: 18-19). There can be little doubt that Pothast's work on Beckett's engagement with philosophy, particularly Schopenhauerian philosophy, benefits from the discoveries of archival investigation.

By acknowledging and exploring Beckett's metaphysics, Pothast's work offers an important counter to the existing philosophical literature on Beckettian tragedy, which consistently posits the absence of metaphysical meaning in Beckett's work.[xvi]

Having discussed the subject of meaninglessness in Beckett's work, I turn to the third premise that shapes Beckettian scholarship in the field of philosophy, namely openness to the 'Other'.

Alterity

The third premise that fundamentally shapes the present understanding of Beckettian tragedy in the field of philosophy is the premise that Beckett's work promotes a 'saving alterity' (Weller, 2006: 2). It is claimed that Beckettian tragedy performs this life-affirming role in two ways. In the first instance it is argued that Beckettian tragedy refuses the totalizing tendency of philosophical interpretation. In the second instance, Beckett's work, in its textual indeterminacy, and openness to the 'Other' – both within oneself, and in the outside world – affirms life by affirming difference.

Beckett's Tragedies Refuse Philosophy's Totalizing Tendency

> The writings of Samuel Beckett seem to be particularly, perhaps uniquely, resistant to philosophical interpretation. To speak from the vantage point of a conceptual framework, an interpretive method or any form of metalanguage, is, at the best of times, a hazardous exercise (Critchley, 1997: 141).

In Adornian theory, the history of Western thought is marked by a tendency towards identity thinking, either in the form of the attempted assimilation or annihilation of alterity. For Adorno, philosophy's position at the apex of Western thought renders it especially culpable for society's desire to destroy difference. Within philosophy itself it is the field of aesthetics that performs the role of oppressor by subsuming the object of contemplation into an existing conceptual framework. Interpreting Adorno's position, Cunningham argues that:

> Aesthetics is implicated within such a logic [the logic of identity thinking] in so far as it exemplifies philosophy's traditional striving for an absolute conceptual identity which would seek, with varying levels of violence or repression, to erase or subsume any moment of non-identity or otherness in its 'object' (Cunningham, 2002: 127).

The significance of the work of Samuel Beckett, then, is that, in its formal negation of the linguistic infrastructure, Beckett's art thwarts philosophy's attempts to provide a totalizing account of its meaning. The modern work of art's lack of meaningful content precludes the manifestation of this tendency, so that, according to Adorno, 'Interpretation . . . cannot pursue the chimerical aim of expressing the play's meaning in a form mediated by philosophy' (Adorno, 1991: 243).

Derrida raises a similar argument with regard to Beckett's importance. Though seemingly a far more reluctant commentator on Beckett, Derrida also situates Beckett's work within the framework of resistance to meta-narratives and identity thinking. Derrida's only recorded commentary on the works of Beckett occurs during an interview with Derek Attridge (Derrida, 1992). In this interview Derrida discusses the 'remains' of the artwork that get left behind in the process of interpretation. In Beckett's case, what is left behind after one has gone into the work and extricated a theme is that which supports the theme and without which the theme appears nonsensical—namely, the 'work-character' of the work, its 'signature' (Derrida, 1992: 61). This particular quality, the work's 'signature', always slips between one's fingers because to grasp it one must rely on a generalisation, which guarantees its escape. One simply cannot claim the particular with a generalization, or as Critchley understands it, relying upon such a method means that 'one cannot hope to be faithful to the *idiom* of Beckett's language (Critchley, 1997: 145).' For Derrida, it is Beckett's grammar that provides his words with their meaning; to colonize Beckett's grammar with a philosophical concept ultimately renders the work meaningless. Whilst this is the case with any work of art, it is the fact that Beckett deliberately structures his work to thwart the goal of interpretation that sets Beckett's work apart from other artists. As Critchley states:

> The peculiar resistance of Beckett's work to philosophical interpretation lies ... in the fact that his texts continually seem to pull the rug from under the feet of the philosopher by showing themselves to be conscious of the possibility of such interpretation ... (Critchley, 1997: 141).

It is Beckett's pre-emptive self-interpretation, combined with the belief that the field of aesthetics tends to provide a totalizing, and therefore destructive reading of its art object, that leads Critchley to argue that:

> It might well be that philosophically mediated meanings are precisely what we should *not* be in search of when thinking through Beckett's work (Critchley, 1997: 142).

For Critchley, then, the danger and destructiveness of interpretive totalization is one of the implicit lessons of Beckett's work. *Any* attempt at interpretation is bound to fail because the artwork seems to have been written to generate such interpretive failure. Critchley cites the tendency of Beckett's philosophical interpreters – including Beckett's more astute philosophical interpreters (Adorno and Cavell) – to fall for Beckett's 'red herrings' (Critchley, 1997: 19, 144) to 'overshoot' the mark, to read too much into the work and to obliterate its non-identity with the applied philosophical concept (Critchley, 1997: 141). Like Derrida, for Critchley the importance of Beckett's work is that it resists thematization, and this resistance makes it futile to search for examples in the work that support the pre-existing conceptual ideas of the interpreter. In essence, then, Critchley endorses Adorno's interpretation of Beckettian formalism—understanding meaninglessness as an idea conveyed in the form of the artwork is the only approach that precludes one from committing the error of reading too much into the text.

Indeterminacy and the 'Other'

In addition to its formal resistance to metalanguage, Beckett's work has also been interpreted as an implicitly ethical undertaking due to its indeterminacy at the textual level. Connor (1988), for example, concentrates on the repetition that occurs within a number of works throughout Beckett's oeuvre, and the difference that one finds within the repeated events themselves. Similarly, Hill (1990) focuses on Beckett's self-translation, and the difference one finds within the 'same' text when presented in a different language. The ethicality of Beckett's work has also been perceived at the thematic level in the works' depiction of the multiplicitous

nature of the self, or, as Weller describes it, Beckett's 'radical splitting' of the self. Summarizing the poststructuralist approach to Beckett's prose and tragedy, Weller states that:

> In their openness or undecidability, Beckett's self-deconstructing works become cites of resistance. In short, they become the most ethical form of textual production, ethical precisely through their inexhaustible resistance to what are taken to be the totalitarian threats of meaning, stability, fixity, and identity, each of which is predicated on a negation of alterity (Weller, 2006: 27-8).

The poststructuralist reading of Beckett as an author of alterity is one that finds its counterpart in the 'many-layered author' that one finds in Martha Nussbaum's essay on Beckett (1990). Here Nussbaum holds that 'Beckett's antinarrative is too many-sided, too ironic, to leave us with any simple comfort'. Quite simply, in Beckett's art all is called into question (Nussbaum, 1990: 305).

The argument that Beckett's work not only has an implicit ethical component but also an explicit one, and that this ethicality is connected to an awareness of the 'Other', or at the very least the possibility of the 'Other', is presented in the work of Alain Badiou (2003). Badiou reads Beckett's work *as* philosophy, and positions Beckett as a thinker whose oeuvre purposively transitions from the evocation of the isolation of solipsism to the later depiction of the recognition that the world may be something more than 'One', namely 'Two' (Badiou, 2003: 16, 5):

> Without doubt it is in Beckett's theatre, with the couples of Vladimir and Estragon (*Waiting for Godot*) or Hamm and Clov (*Endgame*), that something which will not cease to be at the heart of Beckett's fictions comes to the fore: the couple, the Two, the voice of the other, and lastly, love (Badiou, 2003: 60).

For Badiou, Beckett's work becomes ethical only once the possibility of the 'Other' becomes a focus of narrative intent (Badiou, 2003: 4; Smith, 2008: 16), that is when the work becomes the process of 'clearing the ground' in preparation for the anticipated event of the Other's arrival (Gibson, 2003: 124). Given this understanding, Vladimir's determined waiting for news from Godot, his 'holding on to the uncertain', is positioned as an exemplar of the refusal to relinquish the possibility of the Event once conceived (Badiou, 2003: 73), or as an act of 'fidelity to the transformative event' (Smith, 2008: 8). It is not truth, then, that we observe in Beckettian tragedy, but the 'hope of truth' (Badiou, 2003: 22), the potential arrival of which, in the form of the 'Other', Beckett's work facilitates.

Finally, with regard to the claim that the ethicality of Beckett's work centres on Beckett's acknowledgement of the 'Other', Shane Weller (2006) questions the straightforwardness of this position by focusing on the seemingly equally determined negation of the 'Other' in Beckett's work. Whilst Beckett's works 'undoubtedly thematise the experience of seemingly unmasterable alterity in the most explicit fashion, that experience is situated within an unremitting struggle to reduce the other to nothing, to achieve a labour of negation ... that would put an end to being as such, and with it the being (or otherwise) of alterity' (Weller, 2006: 24).

In this reading of Beckett's work, Weller affirms an Adornian understanding of Beckettian art, namely that at the heart of Beckett's oeuvre is the evocation of nihilism's failure:

> in Beckett the negations repeatedly fail to deliver the very 'nothing' they seem to promise, and it is this failure that comes to constitute the very stuff of the work. This is not to say that what remains necessarily possesses a value; rather in a process that disintegrates difference no

> less than identity, Beckett opens the ethicality of both negation and affirmation to question (Weller, 2006: 193).

In short, Beckett shows the failure of nihilism by repeatedly attempting, and failing, to attain the state of nothingness. In this way, to quote Critchley, Beckettian nihilism is a 'redemptive nihilism' (Critchley, 1997: 23). It is for this reason that Weller, in a move that echoes Derrida's earlier assertion that Beckett is both nihilist and anti-nihilist (Derrida, 1992: 60-62), understands Beckett's work as neither ethical, nor unethical, but, rather, 'anethical': 'a failure either to establish or negate the difference between the ethical and the unethical, nihilism, and anti-nihilism...' (Weller, 2006: 194-5).

Having provided a broad overview of the secondary philosophical material on the subject of Beckett's work, the final section of this chapter offers a brief retort to the central claims of this interpretive work. This retort will in turn provide an alternative interpretive framework for the rest of the thesis.

Retort to the Secondary Philosophical Literature on Beckettian Art

I begin with a challenge to the first premise of the philosophical interpretation of Beckett's work, namely that Beckett's work affirms existence.

The present interpretation of Beckett's tragedies as something which are ultimately life affirming in nature is an interpretive endeavour that is greatly informed by Nietzschean thought. Nietzsche is the undeclared third man of the philosophical interpretation of Beckett's work. This interpretive approach, where Beckett's engagement with pre-Nietzschean thought is consistently viewed through the lens of Nietzschean thought tends to conflate Beckett's understanding

of the role of art, and metaphysics, with Nietzsche's philosophical viewpoint. When one takes into consideration Beckett's lifelong intellectual engagement with Schopenhauerian philosophy, the decision to understand Beckett's tragic works through the interpretive lens of Nietzschean thought, i.e. in relation to the main critic of Schopenhauerian philosophy appears, at the very least, questionable.

It is a central claim of this thesis that the discipline of philosophy has yet to interpret Beckett's work in a manner that is free from Nietzsche's pathologising critique of Schopenhauerian thought. Viewed in Schopenhauerian terms, the desired state of 'nothing' is not nihilism. In Schopenhauerian thought 'nothing' is the desired state beyond willful consciousness, and thus beyond suffering. 'Nothing' becomes nihilism only once it is understood in Nietzschean terms. Nihilism is Nietzsche's diagnosis of the life-denying world-view of philosophers such as Schopenhauer. It is Nietzsche's understanding of 'nothing' as nihilism that guides the interpretation of Beckett's work, namely that 'nothing' is a problem, not a goal.

Beckett's engagement with Schopenhauerian 'nothingness' has yet to be interpreted in a manner that is unencumbered by Nietzsche's critique of the will-to-nothingness as an example of nihilism. The degree to which the terms 'nihilism' and 'anti-nihilism' are used in Beckettian scholarship indicates the extent to which Nietzschean thought permeates the philosophical interpretation of Beckett's understanding of 'nothingness', and acts as an interpretive lens situated in between Beckett and his avowed interests.

The use of the Nietzschean interpretive lens has, to date, precluded an interpretation of Beckett's tragedies as a development of Schopenhauer's understanding of art as an event or interaction that can liberate one from suffering (Atwell, 1996: 84). It has also precluded a reading of Beckett's work where the state of 'nothing' is both desired by a number of Beckett's characters *and* attained by a number of Beckett's characters. The alternative reading of Beckett's work that

I propose is one that understands Beckett's tragedies as art forms that build upon Schopenhauerian quietism by providing a new means of achieving the very thing Nietzsche diagnoses as nihilism: withdrawal from the 'embodied' life, through the destruction of one's bodily drives; ascetic practice undertaken with the intention of attaining the state of nothingness.

Once one questions the first premise of the interpretation of Beckett's work – the life-affirming role of art – this in turn calls into question the other life-affirming premises of Beckettian interpretation, namely 'meaninglessness' as life-affirming anti-nihilism, and the life-affirming recognition of difference in the form of the 'Other'.

With regard to the second premise of the philosophical interpretation of Beckett's work, 'meaninglessness', this thesis will present two points of criticism. The first point relates to Beckett's ontology.

Philosophy's claims of Beckett's metaphysical meaninglessness – particularly in the work of Adorno (1991) – do not sufficiently take into account Beckett's early ontology, the 'will not to suffer', as espoused in the critical work *Proust* (Beckett, 1999: 43). Because of this, Beckett's philosophical interpreters have not explored the way that Beckett continues to develop this early ontology in the tragedies of Beckett's middle period. Beckett's will not to suffer, I argue, evolves into the dominant aspect of the pseudocouples that populate Beckett's middle period tragedies.

The second criticism that I have of the philosophical interpretation of Beckett's meaninglessness once again relates to the claim that Beckett's tragedies espouse meaninglessness in an attempt to affirm existence, that is, nihilistic meaning is removed with the intention of making life livable. This claim is made in the work of Cavell and Critchley. In contrast to this position I argue that Beckett's

meaninglessness is not an affirmative endeavour but, rather, part of a unique ascetic method employed by the other aspect of Beckett's tragic pseudocouple, the intellect, to break the will. The intellect's refusal to ascribe meaning to the world, to describe 'what's happening' (Beckett, 1958: 17), effectively denies the will the knowledge it requires to be able to strive. This in turn causes the 'will not to suffer' to suffer to such an extent that it freely chooses to resign from life (WWR 1: 285). Beckett's meaninglessness is life denying.

Finally, with regard to the third premise of Beckettian interpretation – that Beckett's art is life affirming because of the way it implicitly, and explicitly, promotes the recognition of difference, or recognition of the 'Other' – I instead claim that in Beckett's theatre of asceticism the event of the 'Other's' recognition is a life-denying event. In Beckett's middle-period tragedies, the awareness of the 'Other' is an awareness of the *suffering 'Other'*. Far from being a moment where life is affirmed, the recognition of the suffering 'Other' promotes the will's resignation. Indeed, the recognition of the suffering 'Other' is a necessary precursor to the will turning its back on life. It is for this reason – namely that the awareness of the suffering 'Other' causes the 'will not to suffer' to suffer – that the will seeks not to acknowledge the 'Other', and in turn the intellect attempts to promote the will's awareness. My own position – that Beckett's will-not-to-suffer fights to avoid acknowledging the 'Other' – is antithetical, then, to that argued by Badiou.

My intention in the following thesis is to work through the life denying implications of Beckett's sustained engagement with Schopenhauerian thought. I begin this process by providing a detailed discussion of Schopenhauerian aesthetics, which is then followed by a discussion of Beckett's utilization and development of Schopenhauerian aesthetics, in particular, Beckett's ascetic development of the Schopenhauerian dynamically sublime.

PART TWO:

Schopenhauerian and Beckettian Aesthetics

Chapter 3: Schopenhauerian Aesthetics

Introduction

In contrast to the life affirming role assigned to art in the work of the majority of post-Nietzschean thinkers who have engaged with Beckett's work, the role of art in Schopenhauerian philosophy is to guide the audience to a different conclusion about the value of life (WWR 2: 435), namely that 'it would be better for us not to exist' (WWR 2: 605). In aesthetic contemplation a number of transformations are said to occur, two of which are central to Schopenhauer's aesthetics and broader philosophical thought: first, the spectator is freed from 'practical interest', and thus the pain that accompanies the fear and anxiety of egoistical thought; and, second, the pain-free, though momentary, aesthetic state guides the spectator of art onto 'the path to salvation', which is the 'denial and renunciation of life' (Nussbaum, 1999: 360-1; Young, 1987: 85; Zöller, 1999: 36-37, Came, 2012: 243).

What we see, then, in Schopenhauerian thought is that resignation is a two-stage process. First, based upon the will-free experience of the aesthetic state, there is an awareness that the will can, for a few moments at a time, be forgotten, and that during these times the subject experiences a painless state (WWR 1: 196). Second, this momentary state leads the subject to contemplate longer-term, possibly permanent, means of silencing the will; that is one is guided towards ascetic practice (WWR 1: 390). Unlike aesthetic contemplation, and acts of compassion, where suffering is only temporarily interrupted, in ascetic practice the goal is to permanently break the will, and thus put an end to suffering. Asceticism is, then, an awareness that the life of striving is itself suffering, that one's own willing aspect causes one to suffer, and that breaking one's will leads to the state of 'blessed' nothingness (WWR 1: 198-9; Atwell, 1995: 17). Asceticism differs from compassion in that no assistance to relieve suffering is provided, whether it is the

provision of assistance to oneself or to others. Whereas the compassionate person provides relief from suffering, the ascetic understands – as Beckett put it – that the only true painkiller is the non-provision of painkiller (Beckett, 1958: 14, 16, 23, 34, 46). Because of this understanding, the ascetic allows suffering to continue, for suffering is the only means of ultimately breaking the will. The knowledge presented to the will in ascetic practice is that 'the world is full of misery' (WWR 1: 400). This knowledge affords the possibility of 'salvation': the will turns its back on life in horror (WWR 1: 411; and see Atwell, 1995: 31).

For Schopenhauer the true value of art is that it provides us with a glimpse of such lasting peace. Young describes the process in the following way:

> ... what occurs in aesthetic consciousness is the occupation, for a brief moment, of that stance towards the world the permanent maintenance of which represents the solution to the problem of life, the path to salvation (Young, 1987: 85 in reference to WWR 1: 390; WWR 2: 369; see also Taminiaux, 1987: 90).

This, then, is the reason art plays such an important part in Schopenhauerian thought: the aesthetic state guides one onto the path to permanent will-lessness (WWR 1: 390; Zöller, 1999: 36-37), by revealing the very possibility of 'delivering knowledge from the service of the will' (WWR 1: 199).

In the following chapter I elaborate upon these statements, and then proceed to establish this understanding of the role of art as a significant influence upon the aesthetic, and ascetic, thought of Samuel Beckett. In particular, I pay close attention to the role of tragedy in Schopenhauerian aesthetics, and consider Beckett's middle-period theatre in the light of Schopenhauer's conception of tragedy as the 'highest degree' of the feeling of the sublime (WWR 2: 433).

This discussion will commence with the presentation of Schopenhauer's understanding of 'ordinary', or will-full, consciousness in comparison to aesthetic, will-free, consciousness.

'Ordinary' Consciousness

Central to Schopenhauer's understanding of the role of art is the way he distinguishes the aesthetic state from *ordinary*, or empirical, consciousness.[xvii]

Ordinary consciousness is 'interested' consciousness (WWR 1: 177), it is consciousness that understands the world in terms of how the events of the world affect 'me', an individual will among innumerable individuals. In ordinary consciousness the intellect, or 'subject of knowing' (WWR 2: 277) views, and understands, the world from the 'central' position of an individual body (WWR 1: 332), which, in Schopenhauerian terms, is an objectification of the will, or the will seen in representation. The intellect represents the world from, and solely in relation to, *this* body (WWR 1: 177). As Young states:

> In ordinary, will-serving consciousness, all spatio-temporal locating of things is relative, ultimately, to a *here* and *now* that is determined by my own location in space-time as an embodied thing. All lines of direction, as it were, radiate out from myself as the world's 'centre'. I shall call this first mark of ordinary consciousness its 'egocentricity' (2005: 108-109; see also Atwell, 1995: 140; cf. Beckett, 1958: 23-24).

The role of the intellect, then, is to provide information to the individual will with regard to how other objects in the world relate to the body, be they of some benefit, potential harm, or of no interest to the will (Came, 2012: 240; see also Shapshay, 2012a: 489).

For Schopenhauer, the will is the 'primary' aspect of the self, 'the kernel of our inner nature' (WWR 2: 239; see Atwell, 1990: 14). The intellect, and therefore ordinary cognition, is, the mere servant of the will (WWR 1: 176-177; Young, 1987: 83). The intellect has come about solely to provide the individual will (in the form of the objectified body and its insatiable drives) with information, or knowledge, about the environment in which the individual will finds itself. What the will knows about itself is dependent upon the information that is presented to it by the intellect. When functioning as a tool of the will, the intellect converts the raw sensory data received by the senses into individual empirical objects which are understood to exist 'out there' in the world in 'space' and 'time', and causally connected to one another (WWR 1: 8, 177, 187), or, that is, subject to the 'principle of sufficient reason' (WWR 1: 7):

> The function of the intellect in experience is to connect representations according to the principle of sufficient reason in its various guises, and it is this connecting which constitutes the principle of individuation within the empirical realm (Janaway, 1989: 275; see WWR 1: 112, 127).

In this way of viewing the world – namely in relation to the individual will – the intellect presents the objects of the world to the individual will solely with regard to their utility (Guyer, 2008: 169-170). In short, all objects viewed in space, and time, and causally connected to one another are understood as a means to an end; the end being the well being of the individual will, and the body which is the will's objectivity. Schopenhauer describes this process as the addition of 'relative essences' – viewing something with regard to my needs – and the subtraction of 'absolute essence' (WWR 2: 372; Janaway, 1989: 275-276; Young, 2005: 109-110), which can be understood as the essential nature of something prior to my understanding it in relation to my own wellbeing, and thus situated in space, and time, and causally related to other objects.

This 'interest-relative' (Janaway, 1989: 8), or egocentric, way of perceiving the world results in a fearful and anxious existence (WWR 1: 373). Thus ordinary consciousness is a suffering consciousness (Young, 1987: 84). As I am at the centre of my representations every thing, and every event, is perceived in relation to how it relates to me, or, in other words, to my will (WWR 1: 176-177; 332), and because of this:

> ... the world shows up as full of dangers that threaten to engulf us and allurements, objects or desire, which, as desired, are not in our present possession. We are constantly being pushed and pulled here and there by danger and desire. Hence 'care for the constantly demanding will ... continually fills and moves consciousness' (WWR 1: 196). Even at its best, there is a permanent undertone of 'discomfort or disquiet' (WWR 1: 368); 'anxiety' is the 'keynote of our disposition' (WWR 1: 373). It follows that so long as we inhabit ordinary, 'interested' consciousness, 'lasting happiness or peace is impossible' (WWR 1: 196) (Young, 2005: 110-11).

In contrast to this egoistical way of viewing the world, the aesthetic state is a form of 'disinterested' consciousness, or contemplation, where both the object and the subject experience a transformation from 'individual' to 'pure' entities, that is, entities freed from the desires of an individual will (WWR 1: 199).

For whilst the intellect is the servant of the will, there are still ways in which the knowing subject may experience a degree of freedom. One of these is in the aesthetic state, a rare state (WWR 1: 178) of will-free knowledge.

Aesthetic consciousness

In the aesthetic experience the knowing subject, or intellect, is released from the demands of the willing subject in a process Schopenhauer describes as 'tearing itself free' (WWR 1: 178). In the aesthetic state the knowing subject no longer perceives with regard to the needs and aims of the individual will (Pothast, 2008: 60, Nussbaum, 1999: 360-1; O'Hara, 1981: 256; Neill, 2012: 206), that is, it no longer situates itself and other things in space and time, and is thus temporarily freed from representing the world in terms of the principle of sufficient reason (WWR 1: 199). Aesthetic consciousness, then, is a state of being where the knowing subject experiences a sense of 'liberation from the normal mode of knowledge ...' (Atwell, 1996: 84). In the aesthetic state there is a 'suspension of the laws of connection between representations', and objects are freed from 'mind-imposed interrelations' (Janaway, 1989: 276, 9). In essence, then, the aesthetic state depends upon the 'loss of oneself' (WWR 1: 178), or the abolition of individuality in the knowing subject (WWR 1: 169).

In aesthetic consciousness a dual process of transformation of the subject and the object simultaneously occurs. On one side of this transformation the knowing subject, now freed from the imperatives of the willing subject becomes the pure, will-less, subject of knowledge (WWR 1: 178). Unlike the knowing subject, which presents the individual will to itself as an individual in a world of individuals, the pure knowing subject, no longer presents the will as an individual, that is, the pure knowing subject 'ceases to identify himself as an object in the world' (Young, 1987: 85). As such, the pure knowing subject, no longer occupies a position in space or time. Individuality has been 'set aside' (Janaway, 1989: 276), and rather than perceiving the world in terms of utility alone (Janaway, 1989: 8), the subject becomes the 'clear mirror of the object' (WWR 1: 178) that stands before him or her:

> ...we lose ourselves entirely in the object... entire consciousness is filled and occupied by a single image of perception (WWR 1: 179).

This is one side of the transformative process. On the other side of this process stands the object, which when no longer perceived by the subject in terms of its relation to the individual will, also assumes a 'pure' form. Schopenhauer refers to this pure form of the object as the Platonic 'Idea' (WWR 1: 179):

> Schopenhauer's thought (presented in Book III [of *The World as Will and Representation*]) is that ordinarily we set ourselves on the possession of particular objects that we expect to fulfil desires, but that it is possible to so immerse ourselves in the perception of an object that we can actually forget our inevitably unsatisfying desire to possess or consume it, at least for a while (Guyer, 2008: 169-70; see also Janaway, 1989: 276-77).

When no longer viewed in terms of the principle of sufficient reason, the object is freed from inessential mind-imposed features, that is, features that were earlier described as its 'relative essences'. The pure, will-less subject of knowledge, no longer contemplating the object in terms of utility, now considers 'simply and solely' *what* the thing is (WWR 1: 197). Indeed, the 'whole power of the mind' is now 'devoted to perception' (WWR 1: 178; Young, 1987: 85). In the aesthetic state, only the 'essential' aspects of the object are perceived (WWR 2: 379; Young, 2005: 131). For Schopenhauer, then, the Idea is the 'adequate objectivity of the will' (WWR 1: 257), as it is the closest that humanity can come to understanding the nature of reality beyond, or prior to, consciousness; the Idea is the thing-in-itself in representation, though, unlike empirical objects, it is an object that is *not* subject to the principle of sufficient reason (WWR 1: 180).

The 'Idea' is an object seen as a timeless, location-free, eternal form. Schopenhauer describes the Idea as 'every definite and fixed *grade of the will's objectification*, in

so far as it is thing-in-itself and is therefore foreign to plurality. 'These grades are certainly related to individual things as their eternal forms, or as their prototypes' (WWR 1: 129-30). By 'fixed grade of the will's objectification' Schopenhauer suggests that the Ideas are permanent objects that to a greater or lesser extent reveal the will as a thing of constant striving. Thus the Ideas are themselves 'higher or lower grades of the will's objectification', the grade depending upon 'the respective degrees of individuality among the instances of each Idea' (Jacquette, 2005: 151; WWR 1: 128). At the very top of this hierarchy is the human being, which for Schopenhauer is the most complete objectification of the will, and at the bottom of the hierarchy one finds the natural forces, such as gravity, the will's least individuated objectifications (see also Young, 2005: 105).

The Idea, then, is the thing-in-itself in representation, prior to the principle of sufficient reason, though still subject to the most basic feature of perception, namely the subject-object relationship, or being object for a subject (Schopenhauer, 1974a: 41-2). All empirical objects are individual instantiations of the Ideas, with the additional distortion imposed upon then by the subject of knowing in its *impure* form. When we perceive an Idea:

> We are seeing it, as it were, 'pure': we are seeing *through* the sense-dependent trappings of accidental qualities, and the mind-dependent trappings of location in time and space and causal interconnection, to the universal that all these are manifestations of Magee, 1997: 165).

Given this understanding, the representation of the world that occurs when the intellect functions as a servant of the will – so-called 'ordinary' consciousness – is merely an *indirect* objectivity of the will, or the will perceived in representation subject to the additional mind-imposed forms of space, time, and causality (Pothast, 2008: 60).

For Schopenhauer, aesthetic consciousness, unlike ordinary consciousness, is a *painless* state, where the pure subject of knowing is momentarily 'delivered from the miserable self' (WWR 1: 199). Painlessness is a consequence of disinterestedness (Came, 2012: 241), for when willing ceases so does suffering (Janaway, 1999b: 10). In the aesthetic state we are momentarily 'delivered from the miserable pressure of the will' and we 'celebrate the Sabbath of the penal servitude of willing' (WWR 1: 196).

In the next chapter I describe the way that Beckett's epistemology adheres to Schopenhauer's differentiation between ordinary and aesthetic consciousness (Pothast, 2008: 3-4; Wood, 1994: 4; Murphy, 1994: 234; Feldman, 2009: 23).

However, whilst Beckett proposes a similar delineation of experience into ordinary and aesthetic consciousness, Beckett significantly alters the implications of existing in either one of these two states. In Beckettian epistemology, the ordinary state of consciousness – *Habit* (Beckett, 1999: 28) – is one of painlessness, and the aesthetic state is the mode of consciousness in which one experiences the 'suffering of being' (Beckett, 1999: 18-19). Thus Beckett inverts Schopenhauer's understanding as to which state is, or is not, one of suffering. I explore the implications of this inversion in the next chapter and in two later chapters in which I discuss the theatrical presentation of Beckettian asceticism.

The next chapter presents a discussion of Beckett's development of the Schopenhauerian 'Idea'. In Beckett's aesthetics the Idea becomes the 'ideal object', or the awareness of the totality of one's past experience. Importantly, with regards to the development of the Idea in Beckett's work, the 'ideal object' continues to be an object of contemplation that has a detrimental effect on the will's ongoing urge to strive by revealing a reality beyond mere utility.

The role of art in Schopenhauerian aesthetics

Having discussed aesthetic consciousness in relation to ordinary consciousness, we are now in a position to define what art is for Schopenhauer, and to discuss the role of art in Schopenhauerian thought.

As we have seen, for Schopenhauer, the aesthetic state is a way of seeing, unencumbered by the striving will, a 'metaphysical vision' of underlying forms (Pothast, 2008: 48). Schopenhauer writes:

> We can therefore define it accurately as *the way of considering things independently of the principle of sufficient reason* (WWR 1: 185).

The role of art is to facilitate aesthetic consciousness in the mind of the spectator by conveying the Ideas (WWR 1: 237; WWR 2: 408) at their different grades:

> ... what kind of knowledge is it that considers what continues to exist outside and independently of all relations, but which alone is really essential to the world, the true content of phenomena, that which is subject to no change, and is therefore known with equal truth for all time, in a word, the *Ideas* that are the immediate and adequate objectivity of the thing-in-itself, of the will? It is *art*, the work of genius. It repeats the eternal Ideas apprehended through pure contemplation, the essential and abiding element in all the phenomena of the world. According to the material in which it repeats, it is sculpture, painting, poetry, or music. Its only source is knowledge of the Ideas; its sole aim is communication of this knowledge (WWR 1: 184–5).

Whereas natural beauty, and, for that matter any object *may* facilitate aesthetic contemplation, only an artwork has that sole intention, or purpose (WWR 2: 369). The artist, a 'genius' in Schopenhauerian terms, someone able to occupy a will-less, aesthetic state for extended periods of time, creates works which in turn promote this state in the mind of the audience (Young, 1987: 82):

> Art... according to Schopenhauer's aesthetics, is supposed to provide a special, *non-philosophical* and *non-conceptual* kind of access to the direct or adequate objectivity of the will (Pothast, 2008: 42).

Which Idea the artist captures in a work of art depends upon which medium he or she chooses to work within. As discussed earlier, the Ideas comprise a 'definite and fixed *grade of the will's objectification*' (WWR 1: 129-30). For Schopenhauer there is also a corresponding hierarchy of art forms, which capture the hierarchy of the Ideas (Jacquette, 2005: 151; Young, 2005: 105), or, in other words, lower and higher forms of art capture the lower and higher objectifications of the will. At the bottom of this hierarchy one finds architecture, which reveals Ideas such as 'gravity, cohesion, rigidity, hardness, those universal qualities of stone, those first, simplest, and dullest visibilities of the will' (WWR 1: 214). At the other end of this hierarchy one finds the art forms that reveal the Idea of humanity, such as poetry, and the novel. At the top of this hierarchy one finds the art form of tragedy, 'the summit of poetic art (WWR 1: 252), which for Schopenhauer best captures the terrible lot of the will's most complete objectification: humanity.

The two-fold value of Art

We are now in a position to be able to provide a comprehensive answer to the question of what the value of art is for Schopenhauer. By facilitating the aesthetic state, art provides a temporary 'release' 'from the tyranny under which we customarily live' (Magee, 1997: 170, 171). The aesthetic state is one in which the knowing subject escapes its servitude (O'Hara, 1981: 260). We have seen that the work of art, produced out of a state of aesthetic consciousness, facilitates will-lessness in the spectator:

> Aesthetic pleasure in the beautiful consists, to a large extent, in the fact that, when we enter the state of pure contemplation, we are raised for the moment above all willing, above all desires and care; we are, so to speak, rid of ourselves (WWR 1: 390).

This momentary sense of will-lessness, in contrast to the striving egoism of ordinary consciousness, is held to be a painless state:

> ... in its rare moments of success we understand the true function of the aesthetic in human life: 'namely the deliverance of knowledge from the service of the will, the forgetting of oneself as individual, and the enhancement of consciousness to the pure, will-less, timeless subject of knowing that is independent of all relations' (WWR 1: 199) (Nussbaum, 1999: 355).

In terms of facilitating and promoting aesthetic consciousness art also provides, as it were, 'a sign-post to the higher condition of asceticism' (Came, 2012: 243):

> Schopenhauer acknowledges that any such aesthetic transport is only temporary... Yet the experience, more precisely its very possibility, reveals the radical heterogeneity of the intellect and the will in the self. The aesthetic dissociation of the intellect from the will, of the self from the world, and of the self from itself points to a conception of selfhood independent of the will (Zöller, 1999: 36-37).

Thus the momentary freedom from willing that one experiences in the aesthetic moment generated by the work of art, is suggestive of the possibility of longer-lasting, even permanent peace (Young, 1987: 85):

> From this we can infer how blessed must be the life of a man whose will is silenced not for a few moments ... but forever, indeed completely extinguished... (WWR 1: 390).

The second role that art performs, then, in Schopenhauerian thought is that of an awakening to the possibility of the subject's more permanent negation of his or her individual will (Vandenabeele 2008: 206):

> The contemplation of art and the ensuing temporary silencing of the ego show that there is attainable for human beings a state that is free from the domination of the will and the evil that attends all egoism and strife. Art, in other words, points to a mystical state in which our true salvation consists – permanent nothingness (Came, 2012: 243).

There is, then, a fundamental *separation* of art and asceticism in Schopenhauerian thought. For though the aesthetic state can lead one's mind to subsequent ascetic practice, the work of art is not one *of* ascetic practice. By that I mean that art leads one's mind to a way of conducting oneself *aside from*, or *after* one's engagement

with the artwork. Indeed, even the subject matter of tragedy, as we will see in the next section, only implicitly suggests the path that one is to take. For Schopenhauer, tragedy explicitly reveals the inevitability of suffering that accompanies acts of striving. One suffers because one wants. Daniel Came describes this process in the following way:

> All self-conscious beings are characterised by an incessant and inherently painful willing. Willing is a sufficient condition of suffering, because all willing arises necessarily from want or deficiency, and to experience a want is to suffer; therefore to live is to suffer (2012: 237; See WWR 1: 196).

Tragedy, like all other forms of art, guides one to the path of salvation. However, tragedy does not explicitly guide one through the ascetic practice it is said to suggest. Tragedy leads one to the path of salvation and then allows one to continue unaccompanied. In the next chapter on Beckettian aesthetics I describe the way that Beckett draws aesthetics and asceticism much closer together. Whereas in Schopenhauerian thought there is a two-step process of understanding – namely that first one achieves a will-free state in aesthetic consciousness, and then one pursues such will-lessness in deliberate practice that denies the will gratification – in Beckett's middle-period tragedies asceticism is the subject matter of the work. In Beckett's theatre of asceticism, one not only suffers because one strives – as is the case in Schopenhauer's understanding of tragedy – but one also suffers *deliberately*. On Beckett's stage we witness something unique in tragedy. We watch ascetic practice unfold. We watch one part of the self – the knowing subject – deliberately cause the suffering of the other part of the self, namely the willing subject. Beckett is, therefore, far more explicit than Schopenhauer about the value of art. In Schopenhauerian thought, art alludes to another way of being. In Beckett's tragedies, art *shows* the audience how to *attain* the will-less state of permanent 'nothingness'.

In preparation for a full discussion of Beckett's middle-period tragedies as an art form that portrays the practice of asceticism, which is undertaken with the intention of attaining resignation from life, it is necessary to first set out Schopenhauer's understanding of tragedy in detail. Schopenhauer's understanding of tragedy as the highest form of the sublime will prove to be significant for our understanding of Beckett's tragic works as a depiction of the tactics employed by the intellect, or knowing subject, to destroy the willing part of the self.

Schopenhauer and Tragedy

> But Schopenhauer does see the possibility of escape to a better existence, though only for the individual who can use his knowledge of life as a weapon against the will. This possibility Schopenhauer evokes in discussing the form of art that he takes to be the highest, that which deals with the individual suffering human (O'Hara, 1981: 259).

> At the moment of the tragic catastrophe, we become convinced more clearly than ever that life is a bad dream from which we have to awake (WWR 2: 433).

This section outlines Schopenhauer's understanding of tragedy, what tragedy is, and what tragedy conveys. This pre-Nietzschean version of the role of tragedy is of fundamental importance for our understanding of what Beckett in turn appears to 'do' with tragedy. The presentation of Schopenhauer's conception of tragedy permits an alternative reading of Beckettian tragedy to the present philosophical understanding. In contrast to the life-affirming interpretation of Beckettian tragedy found in the works of Adorno, Cavell, Critchley, and Badiou this alternative reading understands Beckett's work in terms of resignationist thought, and positions Beckettian theatre as a unique form of life-denying thought and practice.

As already discussed, Schopenhauer argues that the role of art is to allow the audience to experience the Platonic Idea of the thing of which the individual is an instantiation. We have seen that for Schopenhauer the Ideas appear at different grades, and that each grade is in turn captured by a different art form. The Idea of 'humanity' is revealed by a number of art forms, such as poetry, the novel, and drama, but that the Idea of 'humanity' is best captured by tragedy. For Schopenhauer, tragedy is the 'the summit of poetic art' (WWR 1: 252) because its subject matter is humanity, which he understands as the highest grade of the will's objectivity, and tragedy best captures the terrible lot of humanity (Janaway, 1996: 57). In short, tragedy expresses the:

> The unspeakable pain, the wretchedness and misery of mankind, the triumph of wickedness, the scornful mastery of chance, and the irretrievable fall of the just and the innocent are here presented to us; and here is to be found a significant hint as to the nature of the world of existence. It is the antagonism of the will with itself which is here most completely unfolded at the highest grade of its objectivity, and which comes into fearful prominence (WWR 1: 253).

Unlike the novel, or poetry, then, art forms which often depict life as something other than that of 'wretchedness and misery', the very subject matter of tragedy is the stuff of resignation (Vandenabeele, 2008: 206). The one and only subject matter of tragedy is the description of the suffering that leads to resignation (Janaway, 1996: 57). In this sense, as an art form, tragedy is 'self reinforcing' (Nussbaum, 1999: 355; Young, 2005: 143). Whereas all art alludes to resignation, or, alternatively, points to the peace of a will-free existence:

> we see in tragedy the noblest men, after a long conflict and suffering, finally renounce for ever all the pleasures of life and the aims till then

pursued so keenly, or cheerfully and willingly give up life itself (WWR 1: 253).

Thus the explicit subject matter of tragedy is the misery which leads to resignation, and then, in some cases, the depiction of resignation itself. In contrast to this, all other art forms only *implicitly* suggest resignation by suggesting the possibility of escaping the demands of the individual will.

With resigned humanity as *the* subject matter of tragedy, what, then, does Schopenhauer see as the *form* of tragedy? How is the resigned state reached? Schopenhauer believes there are essentially three tragic modes. To put it another way, tragedy reveals that misfortune is created in three ways. These are 'wickedness, blind fate, and mere attitude to one another (Atwell, 1996: 101, in reference to WWR 1: 254-255; see also Shapshay, 2012b: 21). In the first mode, Schopenhauer lists Richard the III, Iago in *Othello*, and Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*, among others, as characters of 'extraordinary wickedness' whose behaviour manifests their character (WWR 1: 254). In the second mode of tragedy, 'blind fate', Schopenhauer cites *King Oedipus* of Sophocles, the *Trachiniae*, and 'most of the tragedies of the ancients' as examples. 'Modern' examples of this tragic mode are said to include works such as *Romeo and Juliet,* and Schiller's *The Bride of Messina*. Such works evince the suffering that comes about through 'chance or error' (WWR 1: 254). In the third, and final, mode, misfortune is brought about 'by the mere attitude of the persons to one another through their relations.' Because this final mode requires nothing more than the everyday encounter between ordinary people to create the tragic situation, Schopenhauer holds this mode in the highest regard. The final mode shows us 'the greatest misfortune not as an exception, not as something brought about by rare circumstances or by monstrous characters; but as something that arises easily and spontaneously out of the actions and characters of men, as something almost essential to them, and in this way it is brought terribly near to us' (WWR 1: 254). Realising that the action occurring on the stage is something of which we are quite capable, we are left shuddering, 'already in the midst of hell' (WWR 1: 255).[xviii]

What we may take from Schopenhauer's understanding of the three modes of tragedy is the idea that suffering is something that is inflicted on one individual by another individual as a consequence of that individual misperceiving his or her own wants and needs as more important than, or separate to, those of the other. Thus for Schopenhauer, tragedy reveals the suffering that occurs when the will, in response to the knowledge that is presented to it by the knowing subject, misperceives its essential nature – namely that of being one, undifferentiated entity – and instead takes the knowledge subject to the principle of sufficient reason as knowledge of reality. Although I discuss Schopenhauer's understanding of the essential nature of the will-to-life in a later chapter (Chapter 5), it is important to understand that for Schopenhauer individuality is a dangerous illusion (WWR 1: 379), an illusion which leads human beings to act egoistically and to inflict suffering upon one another. Thus for Schopenhauer, tragedy reveals the consequences of the misperception of the essential nature of life—that all is 'one'—as well as the peace that comes when one finally ceases to act egoistically.

In contrast to Schopenhauer's understanding of tragedy, the subject matter of Beckettian theatre is that of *interiority*. Beckettian theatre is not a war amongst separate individuals misperceiving reality, and thus suffering the consequences of that misperception, but rather a battle *within*, between the subject of knowing and the subject of willing. In Beckett's ascetic tragedies the subject of knowing attempts to destroy its willing subject with knowledge of the destructive consequences of egoism and the reality of ubiquitous suffering. It is my contention that the purpose of Beckettian tragedy is to convey a variety of ascetic methods to the spectator.

Having clarified this matter, I now return to Schopenhauer's understanding of tragedy. Regardless of the mode in which it is presented, the central message

imparted to the audience by the subject matter of tragedy is the call to 'resign' from willed life:

> What gives to everything tragic, whatever the form in which it appears, the characteristic tendency to the sublime, is the dawning of the knowledge that the world and life can afford us no true satisfaction, and are therefore not worth our attachment to them. In this the tragic spirit consists; accordingly, it leads to resignation (WWR 2: 433-4).

Each tragedy draws the audience to this state of mind by presenting 'a great misfortune', and the 'terrible side of life' (WWR 1: 254, 252):

> Thus the summons to turn away the will from life remains the true tendency of tragedy, the ultimate purpose of the intentional presentation of the sufferings of mankind; consequently it exists even where this resigned exaltation of the mind is not shown in the hero himself, but is only stimulated in the spectator at the sight of great unmerited, or indeed even merited suffering (WWR 2: 435).

Thus tragedy involves a two-step process in its portrayal of terrible events and the reception of these events by the audience. The events taking place on the stage, the suffering endured by the guilty and innocent alike, is a form of knowledge: striving equates to suffering. Upon watching the trials and tribulations of the protagonist, the audience is left with the thought that it would be better 'not to be' (WWR 2: 605):

> For if this ... turning away from life ... were not the tendency of tragedy, then how would it be possible generally for the presentation of the terrible side of life, brought before our eyes in the most glaring light, to

> be capable of affecting us so beneficially, and of affording us an exalted pleasure? Fear and sympathy, in the stimulation of which Aristotle puts the ultimate aim of tragedy, certainly do not in themselves belong to the agreeable sensations; therefore they cannot be the end, but only the means (WWR 2: 435).

In turn, this realisation on the part of the audience is itself a two-part process, though this one occurs simultaneously: as the audience appreciates that it would be better 'not to be', a sense of elevation is also experienced. This elevation occurs because the spectator, in appreciating that willing, or striving, is *the problem*, and not the *raison d'être* of life, is momentarily elevated above the imperatives of their individual will. Accompanying the experience of resignation, then, is the corresponding feeling of having been 'liberated' from the suffering that comes from willing:

> Liberation, in the most general formulation, is freedom from the will to life, or cessation of the affirmation of the will to life ... (Atwell, 1996: 82).

These are the events the audience witnesses on the tragic stage, and by being an audience to the protagonist's suffering and resignation, 'we learn by suffering in some measure ourselves' (Janaway, 2002: 83-4). What we have 'learned' through suffering, according to Schopenhauer is that individuation is an error of perception, and the egoistical approach to life that stems from that error causes only pain. Suffering, then, is a form of knowledge about the true nature of existence (WWR 1: 253).

Tragedy as an art form analogous to the dynamically sublime

In witnessing the subject matter of tragic theatre, the audience undergoes a particular kind of aesthetic experience, which Schopenhauer describes as 'sublime':

> Our pleasure in the *tragedy* belongs not to the feeling of the beautiful, but to that of the sublime; it is, in fact, the highest degree of this feeling ... that aspect of the world is brought before our eyes which directly opposes our will. At this sight we feel ourselves urged to turn our will away from life, to give up willing and loving life. (WWR 2: 433).

Tragedy, then, is 'analogous to that of the dynamically sublime' because it 'raises us above the will and its interests...' (WWR 2: 433). Typically, the dynamically sublime has been associated with aspects of the natural world that are hostile to humanity:

> Nature in turbulent and tempestuous motion; semi-darkness through threatening black thunder-clouds; immense, bare, overhanging cliffs shutting out the view by their interlacing; rushing, foaming masses of water; complete desert; the wail of the wind sweeping through the ravines (WWR 1: 204).

The contemplation of such scenes, not as a threatened subject, but as a pure, will-less subject of knowledge, is the feeling of the sublime. Tragedy is 'analogous' to such a state, then, as it allows us as an audience to observe events that are hostile to the Idea of humanity, and to do so in an aesthetic, contemplative manner.

In this the sublime differs markedly from the experience of the 'beautiful'. Whilst both the sublime and the beautiful are states in which the Idea of an object presents itself, the reception of an Idea occurs with different degrees of effort.

For Schopenhauer, an object is 'beautiful' if the Platonic Idea of that object presents itself to the observer 'without apprehension' (Trigg, 2004: 172), or when an individual object *invites* the observer to engage with it in a will-free manner, or a manner that is free from its relations to other things in space and time (WWR 1: 197):

> With the beautiful, pure knowledge has gained the upper hand without a struggle, since the beauty of the object, in other words that quality of it which facilitates knowledge of its Idea, has removed from consciousness, without resistance and hence imperceptibly, the will and knowledge of relations that slavishly serve this will. What is then left is pure subject of knowing, and not even a recollection of the will remains (WWR 1: 202; see Shapshay, 2012a: 491-492).

Conversely, the 'sublime' object only becomes the Idea of which it is an instantiation with a degree of *effort* on the part of the observer. For the sublime object to be considered in a pure, will-free manner, the subject must first undergo a struggle with his or her will. Unlike the beautiful object, which invites will-free apprehension, the sublime object has a 'hostile relation to the human will in general, as manifested in its objectivity, the human body (WWR 1: 201)', and is generally understood as a threat to the body. Therefore the intellect must first 'consciously', and 'violently tear itself away' 'from the relations of the same object to the will which are recognized as unfavourable . . . (WWR 1: 202)' to then be able to appreciate the Idea of which the individual object is an example.

Once again, the 'contemplation of something destructive' to the Idea of humanity is

done from a 'vantage point of present safety' (WWR 2: 433-4), such as when watching a character's protracted suffering on the stage from one's seat in the audience.

In a state of subjective safety, and therefore without fearing for oneself, one is able to contemplate the subject matter – that would ordinarily be considered in subjective terms as harmful, and therefore avoided – in terms of its broader implications for 'human willing in general' (WWR 1: 202).[xix] If one feared for oneself in these situations there would then be a reaction – such as running away in fear – and contemplation would therefore cease (Neill, 2012: 209):

> If a single, real act of will were to enter consciousness through actual personal affliction and danger from the object, the individual will, thus actually affected, would at once gain the upper hand. The peace of contemplation would become impossible, the impression of the sublime would be lost, because it had yielded to anxiety, in which the effort of the individual to save himself supplanted every other thought (WWR 1: 202).

Unlike the beautiful, then, where the particular object of contemplation permits a sense of will-lessness to readily occur, and the will is, as it were, momentarily forgotten, the 'sublime' is portrayed in Schopenhauerian thought as an *active* suppression of will-full responses. The sublime state is reached through a two-step process: the knowing subject first violently tears itself away from the will, which later permits will-lessness (Neill, 2012: 208). In the sublime experience the will is borne in mind throughout the entire process that leads to the perception of the sublime Idea of humanity (see Atwell, 1996: 100); that is, the subject is self-conscious during the process of liberation (Shapshay, 2012a: 493, 494).

In tragedy, the will is, figuratively speaking, made to sit and watch what willed life

is like for the highest grade of its objectivity (Shapshay, 2012b: 29). From a position of safety, the sublime 'exposes us to the "bitterness and worthlessness of life (WWR 2: 435)," in such a way as to make us feel "urged to turn our will away from life, to give up willing and loving life... (WWR 2: 433)" (Young, 2005: 142).' And herein lies the 'pleasure' of tragedy for Schopenhauer (Neill, 2012: 210): a feeling of resigned 'exaltation' (WWR 1: 202; see also Shapshay, 2012a; 2012b).

But as well as having experienced 'resignation', there are a number of other possible 'causes' or 'reasons' for this exalted state. In one sense the spectator of tragedy becomes aware of the insignificance of the individual human being, which he or she is:

> He feels himself as individual, as the feeble phenomenon of will, which the slightest touch of these forces can annihilate, helpless against powerful nature, dependent, abandoned to chance, a vanishing nothing in face of stupendous forces... (WWR 1: 204–5).

As subjects we are humbled by such scenes (Young, 2005: 116; Shapshay, 2012a: 497). This is cause for 'exaltation' because by appreciating one's ultimate insignificance, one also perceives existence beyond the mere strivings of the individual will, which on the whole, ensures that one perceives, and acts, egoistically:

> This knowledge allows the characters to free themselves from the drive of their individual will, and it allows the spectators to temporarily acquire the same attitude of freedom ... (Pothast, 2008: 70).

Conversely, one also experiences a sense of power or exaltation in regard to the immensity of the forces of nature by appreciating that all the forces of nature are

dependent upon the same 'feeble' subject for their existence (Atwell, 1996: 100; Shapshay, 2012a: 495):

> ... he also feels himself as the eternal, serene subject of knowing, who as the condition of every object is the supporter of this whole world, the fearful struggle of nature being only his mental picture or representation... One is not oppressed but exalted by its immensity (WWR 1: 205).

Similarly, feelings of power can be attributed to the subject in another, very important, way: in the sublime, the subject of knowing becomes aware that he or she can hold the will at bay (WWR 1: 202). For Shapshay there is a 'qualitative difference in the pleasure experienced' between the beautiful and the sublime 'due to the presence or absence of self-consciousness in these types of experience.' In the former one experiences 'tranquility', in the latter one experiences 'elevation', which is 'due to the fact that for Schopenhauer the subject of the sublime experience is *conscious* of having attained liberation by struggle and of maintaining that liberation from his own individual body and particular strivings' (Shapshay, 2012b: 23-24). Though this jars somewhat with Schopenhauer's position on the subject's lack of free will, and his overall critique of Kant's categorical imperative (see WWR 1: 504), and the necessity of action as a consequence of human character in response to motives, this ability to hold the will at bay suggests that the subject possesses some form of 'negative freedom'. In short, it suggests an important vestige of Schopenhauer's Kantianism (Shapshay, 2012b: 25). The so-called 'negative freedom' that one experiences in the sublime relates to the subject's ability to 'resist the demands of the will to life'. An important difference between Schopenhauer and Kant in this matter, one to which Shapshay alludes, is that Schopenhauer's 'negative freedom' does *not* then permit the 'positive freedom' to act in accordance with moral law, as is the case with the Kantian categorical imperative (Shapshay, 2012b: 25). Rather for Schopenhauer, the negative freedom, the freedom not to act, is an end in itself. Indeed, for Schopenhauer, the very point of the sublime aesthetic experience is to preclude

further action of any kind, What the audience gains by watching tragic theatre, then, is this: by 'contemplating threatening objects aesthetically', the spectator of tragedy 'gains a felt recognition of his or her ability to resist for a time the demands of egoistic striving' (Shapshay, 2012b: 25, 28). This points to life-denying practice beyond the aesthetic experience, i.e., in everyday life outside the theatre. Schopenhauer's understanding of the destructive potential of the sublime is therefore an important development of the Kantian sublime.

This particular understanding of the Schopenhauerian sublime (see also Shapshay, 2012a) – namely that an intellect possesses the 'negative freedom' to resist the demands of the will to life, and that such resistance is undertaken for the purpose of causing the will to suffer – is also of considerable importance for our understanding of Beckett's tragic works as *theatre of asceticism*. Just as Schopenhauer develops Kant's understanding of the sublime, Beckett subsequently develops the Schopenhauerian sublime into the Beckettian sublime: Beckett stages the sublime as an ascetic method. Not only is the Beckettian sublime an experience had by the audience, in Beckettian tragedy the dynamically sublime is also the subject matter of the performance. In *Waiting for Godot, Endgame*, and *Happy Days*, Beckett stages the dynamically sublime process of holding one's will at bay so that the will may gain knowledge it would otherwise seek to evade.

'Ancient' and 'Modern' tragedy

As we have seen, for Schopenhauer the lesson of tragedy is that 'it would be better for us not to exist' (WWR 2: 605). Thus Schopenhauer believes that the subject matter of tragedy promotes resignationism (WWR 2: 433-4). A highly influential critique of this assertion is made by Friedrich Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy*. One of Nietzsche's main arguments regarding ancient tragedy and Schopenhauer's claims regarding its resignationist affect is that the protagonists of ancient tragedy *do not* resign from life. Indeed, far from it. When having reached the point of

resignation, because of the suffering he or she has endured, and the protagonist is forced to make a decision about whether or not to continue, he or she invariably persists (Nietzsche, 1993: 23). The role of art, then, is to promote an affirmative attitude towards life, even in the face of immense suffering:

> Aware of truth from a single glimpse of it, all man can now see is the horror and absurdity of existence...it repels him... Here, in this supreme menace to the will, there approaches a redeeming, healing enchantress – *art*. She alone can turn these thoughts of repulsion at the horror and absurdity of existence into ideas compatible with life... (Nietzsche, 1993: 40).

Schopenhauer concedes that this is indeed the case with 'tragedy of the ancients' (WWR 2: 434). As Schopenhauer sees it, this is a failing on the part of ancient tragedians: 'the ancients had not yet reached the summit and goal of tragedy, or indeed of the view of life generally' (WWR 2: 434-5). Schopenhauer's point is that whilst intrinsically dealing with the subject of resignation, ancient tragedy tends to explicitly contradict itself by encouraging the affirmation of a life shown to be unworthy of affirmation. It is for this reason that Schopenhauer prefers the works of a number of 'modern' tragedians. In a number of modern tragedies, tragedies 'written in the spirit of Christianity' – a religious doctrine that Schopenhauer believes centres on resignationist thought (WWR 2: 615-16) – resignation takes place on the stage (Young, 2005: 143). Because of this, Schopenhauer claims that modern tragedies are superior to their ancient counterparts, that Shakespeare is a "much greater" playwright than Sophocles (WWR 2: 434) (Young, 2005: 143-4). The reason that Schopenhauer makes this claim is that the resignation of the protagonist tends to emphasise the effect of the experience had by the audience upon witnessing the protagonist's suffering. This experience is one of understanding the vanity, or pointlessness, of willed existence (WWR 1: 253).

For Schopenhauer the audience's response to the artwork is the key aspect of the tragic performance. It is because of this particular focus – namely audience reception – that the modern tragedy is preferred to the ancient form: the modern tragedy, in its portrayal of resigned attitude, further facilitates this attitude in the members of the audience. However, even ancient tragedy that explicitly affirms the willed life still facilitates awareness on the part of the audience – no matter how 'obscure' (WWR 2: 435) – that, despite the protagonist's attitude of affirmation, it would be better to resign from life. Therefore

> In both cases [in ancient and modern tragedy] ... there is an invitation to resignation; and although the tragic hero may not actually reach that state the suffering he or she experiences invites the spectator to do so. (Atwell, 1996: 101-102).

Schopenhauer's focus on audience reception of, and audience reaction to, the events on the stage allows him to, as it were, recuperate much of ancient tragedy, along with modern tragedy that also does not explicitly evince resignation on the part of it's protagonists, and to incorporate it into his overall thesis regarding the role of art (Janaway, 1996: 55-6). With regard to tragedy, this permits Schopenhauer to make the claim – and here I repeat an important quotation – that:

> the summons to turn away the will from life remains the true tendency of tragedy, the ultimate purpose of the intentional presentation of the sufferings of mankind; consequently it exists *even where this resigned exaltation of the mind is not shown in the hero himself, but is only stimulated in the spectator at the sight of great unmerited, or indeed even merited, suffering* (WWR 2: 435 emphasis added).

In the next chapter on Beckett's aesthetics I argue that the subject matter of Beckettian tragedy is the intellect's attempts to promote the will's resignation from

life. In this regard, Beckettian tragedy evinces a Schopenhauerian understanding of the role of tragedy as an art form: to reveal to the spectator the worthlessness of willed existence. To this end, as I later discuss in Chapters 8 and 9, a number of Beckett's characters in the tragic works of his middle period resign from life. However, Beckettian tragedy also presents us with moments when, despite the extent of the character's suffering, that character persists in willed life. This persistence is not to be understood as affirmation, but, rather, as a lesson for the audience regarding the failure of an intellect's chosen ascetic method.

In Beckettian tragedy, then, broadly understood as a process of trial and error for the purpose of ascertaining 'best practice' regarding the destruction of one's individual will, failure to break one's will is presented as a determination to endure. That is, failure to break the will is presented in 'ancient' terms. Conversely, resignation, breaking of the will, or success, is presented in 'modern' terms—i.e. the protagonist resigns from life. As such, in Beckettian tragedy, a character's determination to continue striving may be understood in terms of *failure*—a failure to break the will. In turn, a character's resignation may be understood as a *victory* over one's own will, and thus a victory over the very cause of suffering.

The key to Beckettian theatre is that the audience's understands the reasons for the success or failure on the part of the protagonist to attain resignation from the willed life, i.e., which ascetic methods work, and which methods are ineffective. An individual will's determination to endure is not, therefore, a lesson on the subject of steadfastness in the face of ubiquitous suffering, but a *report* to the audience about an unsuccessful method for breaking one's will.

Understood in the light of Schopenhauerian tragic theory, Beckettian theatre is not a return to the ancient, 'affirmative', mode of tragedy as demanded by Nietzsche, and as implicitly affirmed by many of Beckett's philosophical interpreters. In Beckettian tragedy the affirmation of life is presented as a failure to truly

understand the lesson presented by suffering: that we suffer because we strive not to suffer.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that the role of art in Schopenhauerian aesthetics is to facilitate a state of will-lessness in the mind of the spectator. Schopenhauer argues that the will-less state is a painless state. Thus the role of art is to temporarily free the intellect from its inherently anxious role as servant of the will. In addition to this, the aesthetic state is of great importance because it alludes to the possibility of the intellect's ability to hold the will at bay. In witnessing the tragic performance in particular, the spectator becomes aware of his or her negative freedom to deny the individual will, and, specifically in connection to the tragic form, the ability to present the will with knowledge that is a disincentive for action. This ability to temporarily deny the will, guides the art spectator to the more permanent life-denying practice of asceticism.

The next chapter provides a comprehensive discussion of Beckett's aesthetics as an aesthetic that appears to systematically utilize, further develop, and, most importantly, challenge a number of the key features of Schopenhauerian aesthetic theory.

Chapter 4: Beckett's Aesthetics

Introduction

In this chapter I explore the key features of Beckett's aesthetics, first setting out the different states of consciousness that one finds in Beckett's middle-period tragedies – namely 'ordinary' and 'aesthetic consciousness' – and the different types of memory that offer support to the different states of consciousness, namely 'voluntary' and 'involuntary' memory. I also discuss the role of art in Beckett's aesthetics, and, more specifically the role of tragedy in Beckett's aesthetics.

In this chapter I will also explore the importance of the sublime, specifically Schopenhauer's ethical development of the dynamically sublime, for our understanding of Beckett's tragedies.

On each point, I reflect upon the ways in which Beckett appears to have systematically utilized, and, in many cases, significantly developed Schopenhauerian thought. By providing a reading of Beckettian tragedy that understands the work of Beckett's middle period as 'systematic', both in terms of its own method, and with regard to its engagement with Schopenhauerian philosophy, I necessarily present a number of challenges to the way Beckett's work is presently understood. For example, contrary to a number of Beckett's interpreters, I argue that the aesthetic theory that Beckett first espouses in the early critical work *Proust* is maintained and developed in the three ascetic tragedies, *Waiting for Godot, Endgame*, and *Happy Days*. Whereas Beckett's interpreters argue that there is a diminution of aesthetic ambition during the course of Beckett's oeuvre, I contend that Beckettian aesthetics evolves into a complex, systematic aesthetics of ethical self-destruction.

I begin, however, with a broad overview of Beckett's lengthy engagement with Schopenhauerian thought.

From *Proust* to Beckett's Theatre of Asceticism

The principal source for the *critical* understanding of Beckett's aesthetics is Beckett's early work *Proust* (Beckett, 1999; first published in 1930). It is in *Proust*, a work ostensibly on Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, that Beckett establishes his own conception of time (Smith, 2004: 412), and also takes his first steps towards an ontological understanding of the self: the Beckettian will, the 'will not to suffer'.[xx] Here, utilizing a Schopenhauerian 'filter' for exploring Proust's masterpiece (Wood, 1994: 4), Beckett espouses a Schopenhauerian-informed epistemology, an epistemology that differentiates between ordinary, willful consciousness, and aesthetic consciousness, a state in which one's perception is freed from the restrictive needs of the individual will. It is Beckett's contention that the former state is marked by its painlessness, and that the latter state is a state in which one experiences the suffering of being (Beckett, 1999: 18-19).

In this chapter I argue that the Schopenhauerian-informed aesthetic framework that Beckett establishes in *Proust* is of on-going value for the comprehension of the tragedies of Beckett's middle period.[xxi] A number of assertions made in *Proust*, such as the difference between ordinary, and aesthetic consciousness, and 'voluntary' (Beckett, 1999: 32-33) and 'involuntary' memory (Beckett, 1999: 72-3), are elaborated upon in Beckett's middle-period tragedies. It will therefore be necessary to comprehensively elucidate the different types of consciousness first espoused in *Proust*, and to illustrate their on-going utilization and development in the tragic works. What I later show is that central to the generation of suffering in the tragedy of Beckett's middle period is the intellect's refusal to present material

that permits the will to exist in a painless state. In the place of painless, ordinary, consciousness – comprised of representations in space and time – and voluntary memory, which repeats these spatio-temporal representations – the intellect instead presents the individual will with an aesthetic moment in the form of a painful, involuntary memory. Beckett's involuntary memories are invariably the knowledge of suffering.

Further to this, I argue that Beckett's early ontological understanding of the individual human will as the 'will not to suffer' (Beckett, 1999: 43) has a considerable bearing on later Beckettian ascetic practice – here understood in Schopenhauerian terms as the deliberate breaking of the will by refusing the agreeable and looking for the disagreeable (WWR 1: 392) – where unalleviated suffering is presented as an essential component of will-destruction.

The early critical Schopenhauerian-informed theoretical framework that Beckett formulates in *Proust* is further developed in the theatrical works of *Waiting for Godot, Endgame,* and *Happy Days* in the following way. Whilst the early critical framework establishes the difference between the intellect and the individual will, it is only in the later tragedies that Beckett pits these two entities against one another. In *Proust,* Beckett establishes his ontology: *essentially* we are the will not to suffer, it is our 'first nature' (Beckett, 1999: 22), and the intellect's role is to assist the will in this essential desire. Later, in Beckett's middle-period tragedies, Beckett establishes that the will not to suffer is the very cause of suffering. *Waiting for Godot, Endgame,* and *Happy Days* can be understood as a series of interconnected lessons about what we as rational beings can do about the suffering caused by our essential desire to avoid suffering: the intellect can attempt to break the individual will by allowing the will to suffer. The intellect does this by adhering to a two-part ascetic method that utilizes the destructive effects of involuntary memory. It is for this reason that I understand Beckett's tragedies as theatre of asceticism – the unique combination of aesthetics and asceticism – in which Beckett stages the intellect's deliberate attempts to destroy the will.

In short, Beckett's early critical work establishes the *problem*, and the tragic works of his middle period propose a *solution* to this fundamental problem.

It is evident, then, that as well as elucidating a Schopenhauerian informed aesthetics in his early critical work, Beckett continues to develop and refine this aesthetic through an engagement with Schopenhauerian ethics (Weller, 2010b: 111), that is, Beckett uses the tragic form to convey an ethics of ascetic practice, or will-destruction.

In addition to this, Schopenhauer's understanding of the dynamically sublime is vital for our understanding of Beckett's middle-period tragedies. I believe a comprehensive understanding of the Schopenhauerian dynamically sublime, and Beckett's apparent utilization of this particular aspect of Schopenhauer's aesthetics, helps us to understand 'what's happening' (Beckett, 1958: 17) in Beckettian tragedy.

It is my contention that the Schopenhauerian dynamically sublime – the key feature of which is suffering, as opposed to the 'tranquility' one experiences in other aesthetic states – provides a productive framework for interpreting the tragedies of Beckett's middle period. The Schopenhauerian dynamically sublime, a two-step process where the will is first held at bay (WWR 1: 202), so that it may then appreciate suffering, or gain 'knowledge' of suffering, is later manifested in Beckettian tragedy as a process of the knowing subject holding the willing subject at bay by refusing to provide a clear motive for action, then subsequently revealing the 'reality' (Beckett, 1999: 22, 33) of one's experience through the presentation of an involuntary memory.

This appears to be a significant development of Schopenhauerian thought. Beckett transforms an important aspect of Schopenhauerian aesthetics – the dynamically sublime – into a central feature of a unique ascetic method. Beckett therefore

transforms Schopenhauer's theory regarding tragic spectatorship – namely the necessity of first holding the will at bay, so as to then appreciate the Idea of Humanity – into the subject matter of the performance. Beckett is the first tragedian to understand that the thing that allows one to appreciate the suffering that takes place on the tragic stage – the negative freedom to deny the will – has great ascetic potential. What one must first do to be able to observe the suffering of the characters on the stage, one must also do to appreciate one's own suffering. This is what Beckett *shows* the audience.

In Beckettian tragedy the aesthetic theory of the dynamically sublime is transformed into an integral aspect of practical ethics. Beckett's apparent utilization of Schopenhauer's understanding of the dynamically sublime as an integral aspect of an ascetic method is one of the most important and, at the same time, most overlooked aspects of Beckett's tragedies, and Beckett's aesthetics more broadly.

Though I explore this contention at length in a number of later chapters on the subject of asceticism (Chapter 7, 8, and 9), several examples taken from Beckett's three ascetic tragedies will help to both introduce, and to illustrate, this point.

In *Waiting for Godot* we witness Lucky's protracted attempt to deny his master, Pozzo, any information about the world that will permit his master to strive. That is, Lucky denies Pozzo habitual knowledge – knowledge that presents the individual will with a range of options, or motives, regarding its own wants and needs – and, instead, generates the suffering that accompanies irresolution:

LUCKY: But not so fast and considering what is more that as a result of the labours left unfinished crowned by the Acacacacademy of Anthropopopometry of Essy-in-Possy of Testew and Cunard it is established beyond

all doubt all other doubt than that which clings to the labors of men that as a result of the labors unfinished of Testew and Cunnard it is established as hereinafter but not so fast for reasons unknown that as a result of the public works of Puncher and Wattmann it is established beyond all doubt that in view of the labours of Fartov and Belcher left unfinished for reasons unknown of Testew and Cunard left unfinished it is established what many deny that man in Possy of Testew and Cunard that man in Essy that man in short that man in brief in spite of the strides of alimentation and defecation wastes and pines wastes and pines and concurrently simultaneously what is more for reasons unknown ... (Beckett, 1956: 43).

Whilst 'holding the will at bay' in this manner, where the will is denied the knowledge it requires to be able to act – the first step in a two-part ascetic method – the intellect then alternatively provides the will with information about the will's true nature. Whilst held in a state of uncertainty, Lucky provides his master with the knowledge of his culpability for the starvation death of thousands of people:

LUCKY: ... figures stark naked in the stockinged feet in Connemara in a word for reasons unknown... the skull... the tears...the skull the skull the skull the skull in Connemara in spite of the tennis... the skull the skull in Connemara in spite of the tennis the skull... (1956: 44-5).

The second step, then, in the two-part Beckettian ascetic method is the provision of knowledge regarding previous suffering, which arrives in the form of an involuntary memory. This involuntary memory is presented to the will with

destructive intent, that is, an involuntary memory is recalled for the purpose of placing the individual will in such a position of suffering that the will freely chooses to cease striving (WWR 1: 285, 295).

Similarly in *Endgame*, the knowing subject, Clov, refuses to provide his master, Hamm, with a clear motive for action. This 'refusal' on Clov's part is carried out with the intention of making Hamm suffer. Hamm is, therefore, denied the kind of knowledge – a representation in space, and time, which is in turn causally connected to other representations – that permits the individual will to strive and to avoid suffering:

HAMM: Is it night already then?

CLOV: (*looking.*) No.

HAMM: Then what is it?

CLOV: (*looking.*) Grey. (*Lowering the telescope, turning towards Hamm, louder.*) Grey! (*Pause. Still louder.*) GRREY!

Pause. He gets down, approaches Hamm from behind, whispers in his ear.

HAMM: (*starting*). Grey! Did I hear you say grey?

CLOV: Light black from pole to pole (Beckett, 1958 26).

Again, this denial of a representation subject to the principle of sufficient reason is carried out as the first part of a two-part ascetic method. When permitted to suffer in this way – that is, when the will is denied habitual perception – the individual will is susceptible to the suffering that accompanies an involuntary memory. Once again, in Hamm's case, the involuntary memory comes in the form of the unwanted knowledge of his own cruelty and indifference (Beckett, 1958: 48).

Finally, in *Happy Days* we witness the intellect's attempts to deny the individual will a motive for action. In an attempt to make the individual will, Winnie, suffer, the intellect, Willie, refuses to provide his 'wife' with information about the world:

> WINNIE: [*Long pause. Calling.*] Willie! [*Pause. Louder.*] Willie! [*Pause. Mild reproach.*] I sometimes find your attitude a little strange, Willie, all this time, it is not like you to be wantonly cruel (Beckett, 1961: 26).

The withholding of trivial, habitual, knowledge – knowledge subject to the principle of sufficient reason – is carried out with the intention of facilitating the reception of unwanted knowledge. In Winnie's case the unwanted knowledge is the involuntary memory of how much the individual will has suffered as a child.

I argue that in all three plays we witness Beckett's unique utilization of Schopenhauer's aesthetic theory regarding the dynamically sublime. In all three plays the intellectual aspect of the self denies the will (WWR 1: 202) by denying it the painless experience of ordinary consciousness, or information presented in space and time. In *Waiting for Godot, Endgame,* and *Happy Days* we also witness the presentation of destructive knowledge in the form of involuntary memories of past suffering presented with the intention of placing the will in such a position of suffering that the will freely chooses to resign from life.[xxii]

I further argue that in each of Beckett's ascetic tragedies, the dynamically sublime is utilized as an integral part of an ascetic method. The Beckettian dynamically sublime, then, is not only an aesthetic theory it is also part of a Schopenhauerian-informed aesthetic-ascetic method for will-destruction.

Bearing this introductory material in mind, I shall now proceed to a detailed discussion of Beckett's aesthetics in which I first outline Beckett's conception of 'ordinary', willful consciousness.

Ordinary consciousness

VLADIMIR: But habit is a great deadener (Beckett, 1956: 91).

Central to any understanding of Beckett's epistemology is Beckett's understanding of the workings of *Habit* (Beckett, 1999: 18). For Beckett, Habit plays a comparable role to that of Schopenhauer's knowing subject (WWR 2: 277-8). As for Schopenhauer, for Beckett, the 'world' is merely a 'projection of the individual's consciousness' (Beckett, 1999, 19), 'habitual' perception is perception that positions the world in space and time for the benefit of the individual will (Beckett, 1999: 90). Wood describes Beckett's 'habitual consciousness' as that which understands the things of the world as possessing, or lacking utility:

> Habit-determined mental attention packages sensory impressions into motives – habit orders events in space, and time, and places them in a causal chain – these disguise the object into one of use for the subject (Wood, 1994: 4; see also Pothast, 2008: 118).

Thus Beckett's conception of habitual perception appears to utilize Schopenhauer's portrayal of 'ordinary' consciousness (see WWR 1: First Book). Habit distorts perception for the benefit of the individual will. The individual will needs only to understand enough of the world to permit the individual will to function without suffering. This spatio-temporal understanding for the benefit of the individual will has an inherently *distorting* and *deadening* affect:

WINNIE: ... no better, no worse ... no change ... no pain (Beckett, 1961: 2).

As well as positioning the world in relation to the individual will, Habit *also* defends the individual will by further filtering the types of representation it provides. According to Acheson, Beckettian Habit 'intervenes in the act of forming perceptual images to ensure that psychologically unpleasant elements are excluded' (Acheson, 1978: 169, in reference to Beckett, 1999: 18-19).

This suggests a 'historical' understanding on the part of the intellect: certain, prior representations have caused the will to suffer, and are therefore not to be presented again. Schopenhauer proposes a similar understanding when he describes the way the will often 'prohibits the intellect from having certain representations' that it knows from previous occasions will cause it distress (WWR 2: 208; and see Gardner, 1999: 377). There is, then, a two-fold aspect to the intellect's 'filtering role'. The first aspect is that of the mind's *a priori* filtering of data into images situated in space and time, which are causally connected to one another. The second aspect is the intellect's filtering out of specific 'knowledge', which the intellect knows from previous experience will cause the will to suffer.

The 'truth' is irrelevant for such need-generated perception. The only utility is that which permits the will to act in a habitual fashion, and therefore to avoid suffering. It is for this reason that Rabinovitz understands the role of Beckettian Habit as a defence mechanism against painful knowledge:

> Habit generates the mind-numbing ennui we use to anesthetize whatever is painful or threatening; by invoking it we live at a re-move from whatever is authentic in our existence (1995: 217).

To this end 'the will buckles all experience into incoherence' (Beckett, 1999: 72), by which Beckett means that the habitual intellect, on behalf of the individual will, understands, or represents the world solely with regard to that which has utility for the individual 'will not to suffer' (Beckett, 1999: 43) at a particular time, and in a particular place, and based upon present concerns:

> Habit is a compromise effected between the individual and his environment, or between the individual and his own organic eccentricities, the guarantee of a dull inviolability, the lightning-conductor of his existence. Habit is the ballast that chains the dog to his vomit. ... Life is habit. Or rather life is a succession of habits, since the individual is a succession of individuals; the world being a projection of the individual's consciousness (an objectivation of the individual's will, Schopenhauer would say), the pact must be continually renewed, the letter of safe-conduct brought up to date... Habit then is the generic term for the countless treaties concluded between the countless subjects that constitute the individual and their countless correlative objects (Beckett, 1999: 18-19).

When perceiving the world in this manner, one perceives merely 'the mock reality of experience'. In comparison to the experience of 'reality' such perception is 'vulgar' as it deals only in the phenomenal realm. For Beckett the phenomenal realm is merely a protective filter placed in between the individual will and the world: 'a minister of dullness,' and 'an agent of security' (Beckett, 1999: 33, 22, 17, 21):

> Habit acts as a screen between us and unpleasantness in the everyday world, or rather, as a series of screens, since changes of environment expose us to different sense data and require us to adapt (Acheson, 1978: 169).

For Beckett, then, as for Schopenhauer, there is more to experience than that presented in perception for the benefit of the individual will. And like Schopenhauer, Beckett believes that 'reality' is perceived in the moments when one perceives in a will-less state, that is, when one perceives aesthetically (see WWR 1: 185).

Aesthetic consciousness

In contrast to habitual perception, which is a mere projection of the will, aesthetic experience is an event when 'the surface' is penetrated, and one sees more than 'the façade, behind which the Idea is prisoner' (Beckett, 1999: 79). Whilst Habit is a generally effective means of delimiting the individual's experience, there are moments when Habit either fails, or is forced to adjust to a new circumstance. These moments, when the individual is in the process of adapting to a new state of affairs, are both painful and filled with possibility:

> The periods of transition that separate consecutive adaptations... represent the perilous zones in the life of the individual, dangerous, precarious, painful, mysterious and fertile, when for a moment the boredom of living is replaced by the suffering of being (Beckett, 1999: 18-19).

Beckett goes onto describe 'the suffering of being' as 'our first nature', which is 'laid bare during these periods of abandonment' (Beckett, 1999: 22), that is, when the will is exposed to reality (Pothast, 2008: 118):

> ... in the intervals between Habit's changes of screen we suffer because we are presented, harshly, with an uncensored view of the world (Acheson, 1978: 170).

Appearing to follow both Schopenhauerian epistemology and aesthetics at this juncture, Beckett observes that when Habit fails, that is, when the individual will is temporarily exposed to reality, what is observed is not an object amongst other objects, and thus perceived in relation to the principal of sufficient reason but something perceptually 'unique':

> ... when the object is perceived as particular and unique and not merely the member of a family, when it appears independent of any general notion and detached from the sanity of a cause, isolated and inexplicable in the light of ignorance, then and then only may it be a source of enchantment. Unfortunately Habit has laid its veto on this form of perception, its action being precisely to hide the essence—the Idea—of the object in the haze of conception—preconception (Becket, 1999: 22).

Thus an object is a source of 'enchantment' only when the subject no longer perceives as an individual situated in space and time, and, correlatively, the object is perceived as being alone and nowhere:

> When the subject is exempt from will the object is exempt from causality (Time and Space taken together) (Beckett, 1999: 90; cf. WWR 1: 10; see also Rabinovitz, 1995: 208-9).

Beckett's understanding of both habitual perception, and aesthetic consciousness appears to mirror Schopenhauer's understanding up to this point, including the

idea that in the aesthetic moment a simultaneous transformation occurs in the subject and the object, rendering both 'pure' (Beckett, 1999: 75; WWR 1: 178). Where Beckett begins to progress this thought beyond Schopenhauerian aesthetics is in connection to the way that Habit subsequently affects memory. As with moments of transition from one habit to the next, the way one remembers may also provide a powerful means of affecting the individual will. That is, the way the intellect remembers can be either deadening or 'deadly' (see Beckett, 1958: 25).

Voluntary and involuntary memory

VLADIMIR: Extraordinary the tricks that memory plays!
(Beckett, 1956: 50)

There are essentially two types of memory in Beckettian thought. The first and foremost of which is described as 'voluntary memory'. As with ordinary consciousness, voluntary memory functions in a similar way to Schopenhauer's servant of the will (cf. WWR 1: 176, WWR 2: 216; 641). Voluntary memory is a repetition of a moment in time, which has already been deformed by the intellect, by Habit:

> This is the uniform memory of intelligence; and it can be relied on to reproduce for our gratified inspection those impressions of the past that were consciously and intelligently formed. It has no interest in the mysterious element of inattention that colours most commonplace experiences. It presents the past in monochrome. The images it chooses are as arbitrary as those chosen by the imagination, and are equally remote from reality. ...The material that it furnishes contains nothing of the past, merely a blurred and uniform projection once removed of our anxiety and opportunism — that is to say, nothing. ... It insists on that

> most necessary, wholesome and monotonous plagiarism—the plagiarism of oneself (Beckett, 1999: 32-33).

In short, if one recalls for the benefit of the individual will, one finds nothing more than the material of Habit, which was in turn perceived for the benefit of the individual will:

> The most successful evocative experiment can only project the echo of a past sensation, because, being an act of intellection, it is conditioned by the prejudices of the intelligence which abstracts from any given sensation... whatever... cannot be fitted into the puzzle of a concept (Beckett, 1999: 71-2).

In the tragic works of Beckett's middle period there are numerous examples of voluntary memory, that is, where the willing subject either demands that the intellect 'habitually' retrieves an event formed by ordinary consciousness, or the will itself merely repeats such knowledge. In *Waiting for Godot,* Vladimir asks Estragon to recall his earlier reading of the bible, in response to which, Estragon recalls the pleasurable memory of encountering the maps of the Holy Land:

> Coloured they were. Very pretty. The Dead Sea was pale blue. The very look of it made me thirsty. That's where we'll go, I used to say, that's where we'll go for our honeymoon. We'll swim. We'll be happy (Beckett, 1956: 12).

In *Endgame* we witness an extended 'voluntary' evocation in the form of Hamm's lengthy 'chronicle' (Beckett, 1958: 35-37), the story that he has been telling himself all his days (40). In the representation of an important moment in his life –

where his servant-son, Clov, comes into his service – Hamm recollects events for the purpose of maintaining his sense of being a benevolent man:

> Well to make it short I finally offered to take him into my service. He had touched a chord (37).

In his story – the voluntary memory of habitual consciousness – Hamm understands himself – that is, presents himself to himself – as the kind of person who takes a starving man and his child into his own home.

In the play *Happy Days*, upon hearing the name Charlie Hunter, Winnie evokes the memory of her coming of age. The earlier, disturbing, childhood memory of sitting on Charlie Hunter's knee has thus been conflated with later, pleasant, social events, including Winnie's first romance:

> WILLIE: His Grace and Most Reverend Father in God Dr Carolus Hunter dead in tub.
>
> WINNIE: [*Gazing front, hat in hand, tone of fervent reminiscence.*] Charlie Hunter! [*Pause.*] I close my eyes – [*she takes off spectacles and does so, hat in one hand, spectacles in the other, Willie turns page.*] – and am sitting on his knee again, in the back garden at Borough Green, under the horse-beech. [*Pause. She opens eyes, puts on spectacles, fiddles with hat.*] Oh, the happy memories!
>
> ...
>
> WINNIE: My first ball! [*Long pause.*] My second ball! [*Long pause. Close eyes.*] My first kiss! (1961: 5).

Thus voluntary memory reinforces habitual perception, by repeating information that has previously passed the censorship of the individual will, and further immerses the individual will into the warm bath already poured by habitual consciousness (WWR 2: 208).

In *Waiting for Godot*, voluntary memory consoles Vladimir with the thought of future happiness. In *Endgame*, voluntary memory assures Hamm that he is a good man, and in *Happy days*, voluntary memory encourages Winnie to believe in the inviolability of childhood innocence, and romance.

In contrast to voluntary memory, 'involuntary memory' is a moment when the subject is said to remember an event objectively, and therefore experiences reality. Occurring because of the 'negligence or agony of Habit' (Beckett, 1999: 35), involuntary memory is when one experiences:

> ... the total past sensation, not its echo nor its copy, but the sensation itself, annihilating every spatial and temporal restriction, [which] comes in a rush to engulf the subject in all the beauty of its infallible proportion (Beckett, 1999: 72-3).

An involuntary memory, where one is said to experience the totality of a past experience, comes about as a result of an external stimulus, for example, a sound heard in the present moment can conjure up, all the 'circumreferential phenomena, stored away in the back of the memory in unconceptualized form' (Wood, 1994: 4; see also Acheson, 1978: 172). One experiences the entirety of a past experience and not merely that fragment, or version, which had utility to the individual will at the time of its initial reception (see Beckett, 1999: 72-3). In his description of the content of involuntary memory, Beckett goes on to say that:

> ... thanks to this reduplication, the experience is at once imaginative and empirical, at once an evocation and a direct perception, real without being merely actual, ideal without being merely abstract, the ideal real, the essential, the extratemporal (Beckett, 1999: 75).

This dense, seemingly contradictory, passage requires some explication. The sensation is said to be 'imaginative' and 'empirical' as it resides in the intellect, yet it is 'present to the subject's will-less aspect in exactly the same form as when originally experienced.' As the totality of events of the moment held no utility for the will, they neither registered at the time of reception, nor have they become the content of subsequent voluntary memory. For, as we have seen, only that which had utility for the individual will at the time of reception will later form the basis of voluntary memory. The involuntary memory is also 'real' in the sense that it is 'a facet of the reality we daily neglect', but not 'merely actual' in that for it to be remembered, or recreated, it does not require the very same type of event to take place in the present. And, finally, the content of involuntary memory is 'ideal' to the extent that it is perceptual content, 'concrete' as opposed to an 'abstraction' (Acheson, 1973: 173-4), which is a generalization of specific perceptual material for the benefit of the individual will (WWR 1: 21-22). The 'ideal real', then, is a past experience, the sensation, as it was originally received in full by the intellect. It is the *early* Beckettian Idea.

Pothast (2008) has noted that the substance of the Beckettian Idea – 'the metaphysical reality, which according to Beckett is the object of art' – is a radical and welcome departure from the 'Platonic Idea' found in Schopenhauerian aesthetics (127-8). Whereas for Schopenhauer, as we have seen, the Platonic Idea is an adequate objectification of the will (WWR 1: 257), the thing-in-itself in representation, an object seen by the pure knowing subject as a timeless, location-free, eternal form (WWR 1: 129-30), in early Beckettian aesthetics, the Idea is manifested as:

> the true reality of an experience once made in the course of time, and in itself shows, as it were, a temporal structure... involuntary memory recalls the past self as well as the full extent of the self's experience; both not disfigured by the will-controlled mechanisms of everyday survival and both therefore true (Pothast, 2008: 125-126).

It should be noted that Beckett's evocation of the 'ideal real' is viewed by a number of commentators as a short-lived attempt to 'formulate a viable aesthetic' at a time when it was fashionable to do so, and that whilst the 'Ideal real' permeates Beckett's later work it does so in a more and more ironic, sometimes parodic, manner (Ackerley, 2009: 66; see Gontarski, 2008: 93-106; Eastham, 2007).

I would argue that this 'ironic' reading of Beckett's deployment of involuntary memory is one subject to the effects of philosophy's determination to discount the implications of Beckett's engagement with pre-Nietzschean aesthetics as a whole, especially the idea that Beckettian thought may be in any way systematic.

In contrast, then, to the argument of a number of Beckettian interpreters who suggest that Beckett's aesthetics after *Proust* experiences a significant diminution with regards to its ambition – i.e. that the aesthetic moment no longer features as part of an overarching aesthetic theory, but rather becomes a mere comedic, or dismissive, device – I argue that the Beckettian Idea first discussed in *Proust* continues to play an essential part in a complex system of thought. This system of thought, one based upon the notion that there are different ways of seeing and knowing, continues to evolve throughout Beckett's oeuvre.

The framework of the aesthetic found in *Proust*, namely that the role of art is to present the audience or reader with material that facilitates the aesthetic moment, is still firmly in place in the tragedies of Beckett's middle period. The foundational aspects of this framework, such as Beckett's differentiation between ordinary

consciousness and aesthetic consciousness, continue to operate in Beckett's tragedies. In addition to this, in *Waiting for Godot, Endgame,* and *Happy Days,* Beckett continues to situate his two ways of experiencing life – ordinary and aesthetic consciousness – in relation to the individual will's desire 'not to suffer'. In both *Proust* and the three plays, the individual will either avoids or experiences suffering depending upon what kind of knowledge the intellect presents to the will. In ordinary consciousness the will evades suffering. In aesthetic consciousness the willing subject suffers. This, then, is an enduring feature of Beckett's aesthetic position.

To claim that involuntary memory, or the aesthetic moment, is not part of an overarching aesthetic theory, as Beckett's aesthetic interpreters are wont to do, appears to overlook the *consistent* way that the aesthetic moment comes about in Beckettian tragedy, and *the intention* that lies behind its deliberate generation, namely as a destructive device. The aesthetic moment of Beckettian tragedy may be understood as a kind of negative epiphany. In contrast to an epiphany, where a character, or person suddenly understands what he or she is to do with his or her life (Young, 1987: 100; Shapshay, 2012a: 480), the negative epiphany is the moment when the individual will – confronted by the suffering of being – understands that it is for the best that it ceases to strive. Whereas the epiphany appertains to future conduct, the negative epiphany is a painful awareness of past events. But this destructive knowledge of suffering only comes about because of the intellect's deliberate non-presentation of painless, habitual knowledge. The negative epiphany as portrayed in Beckettian tragedy is the final part of a systematic method for breaking the individual will. Beckett consistently employs the tragic form to convey this method.

In essence, then, my approach, which is to acknowledge the ontological basis to Beckett's middle-period tragedies, in turn permits one to acknowledge the negative epiphany that threatens that ontological basis. This approach counters Adorno's assertion that the absence of metaphysical meaning precludes the epiphany (Adorno, 1991: 242). In my reading of Beckett's tragedies, the ontological

basis to life – the Beckettian 'will not to suffer' – *necessitates* the negative epiphany. It is the 'will not to suffer's' refusal to acknowledge suffering, be it the suffering one has caused or the suffering one has endured, which in turn allows the 'will not to suffer' to continue to strive, and thus to continue to suffer.

Although Beckettian ascetic practice as presented in Beckett's three ascetic tragedies will be discussed at length in two later chapters, we are now in a position to formulate this ascetic method for encouraging the individual will's resignation. This overarching ascetic method – which bears many similarities to the two-part process described by Schopenhauer as the dynamically sublime – is found in all three of Beckett's ascetic tragedies.

In the Beckettian sublime, the intellect, or knowing subject, first holds the individual will at bay (WWR 1: 202) by refusing to provide a *clear* motive (WWR 1: 138-9, 300-1) for action, that is, a representation subject to the principal of sufficient reason. This denies the individual will the deadening experience of habitual consciousness (Beckett, 1956: 91). Held in this 'perilous zone' (Beckett, 1999: 18-19) between acts of habitual perception, the individual will suffers in two distinct ways: it first suffers the pain of lacking an object towards which it may expend its energy (WWR 1: 164), and it then suffers from the knowledge it receives in the place of habitual consciousness, namely knowledge about the ubiquitous nature of suffering. Denied the painlessness of habitual consciousness, the individual will is revealed to itself – via an 'involuntary memory' (Becket, 1999: 72-3) – either as a being that has suffered, or a being that has caused others to suffer. This sudden awareness of past suffering – a negative epiphany – is itself a cause of suffering. The *intention* that lies behind the deliberate generation of such suffering is to place the individual will in a position of such pain that it chooses to turn its back on life. This method is the focus of two later chapters (Chapters 8 and 9) on Beckettian asceticism.

This reading bears a number of structural similarities to Badiou's understanding of later Beckettian literature. Badiou also understands Beckett's work as a determined clearing away (Gibson, 2003: 124) of the trivial aspects of life in preparation for the 'Event', namely the 'truth'. Similarly, Badiou claims that Beckett's characters evince the trait of 'holding on to the uncertain' (Badiou, 2003: 73), in that a number of Beckett's characters refuse to give up on the hope of truth (Badiou, 2003: 22), once that truth has presented itself as a possibility. For this reason it is important that I differentiate my reading from that presented by Badiou. The main difference between the two readings is the intent which underlies the 'clearing of the ground' and the 'holding on to the uncertain'. Badiou understands Beckett's ultimate intention as one of affirmation. The Badiouian Beckett clears the ground in preparation for the arrival of the 'Other'. Thus Beckett's work is presented as an escape from the isolation of solipsist thought. In contrast to this reading, I believe that this process of refusing the mere phenomenal is undertaken for the purpose of life-denial. Beckett's ascetic characters both clear the ground, and refuse to provide the will with certainty – or, in other words, refuse to furnish the will with habitual consciousness – in an attempt to generate knowledge of the truth, which is unbearable. In *Waiting for Godot, Endgame,* and *Happy Days* the truth is a destructive occurrence. In my reading of Beckettian tragedy, awareness of the 'Other' is an awareness of the suffering other, an awareness that results in resignation not affirmation. In Beckett's tragedies, when one beholds the 'truth', one becomes aware of the ubiquitous suffering of one's 'comrades in distress' (Beckett, 1999: 67), and most importantly one becomes aware of one's contribution to that suffering:

CLOV: (*harshly.*) When old Mother Pegg asked you for oil for her lamp and you told her to get out to hell, you knew what was happening then, no? (*Pause.*) You know what she died of, Mother Pegg? Of darkness.

HAMM: (*feebly.*) I hadn't any.

CLOV: (*as before.*) Yes, you had (Beckett, 1958: 48).

Far from experiencing a diminution in ambition, it appears that the aesthetic that one encounters in Beckett's theatre of asceticism is both more ambitious in its claims than the aesthetic theory found in *Proust*, and more systematic than its critical progenitor.

What, then, are the features of the more ambitious aesthetic that one finds in Beckett's theatre of asceticism? What developments have occurred between the writing of *Proust* and the writing of *Waiting for Godot*?

Firstly, in the three ascetic tragedies Beckett consistently argues that one kind of consciousness – ordinary consciousness – can be deliberately denied, and by doing so another kind of experience – aesthetic consciousness – can be evoked. Whereas in *Proust* it was argued that the aesthetic state could not be 'importuned' (Beckett, 1999: 34), in the three ascetic tragedies Beckett consistently argues that a way has been found to generate involuntary memory, or the aesthetic moment, namely by denying the individual will the protective filter of Habit.

Secondly, by deliberately evoking the aesthetic state through the non-presentation of habitual consciousness, the intellect can present the individual will with destructive knowledge, that is, knowledge that acts as a disincentive to further action.

By the time Beckett writes *Waiting for Godot*, then, his work has transitioned from establishing his ontological and epistemological theories to providing answers to the questions they raise. The problem that Beckett implicitly raises in *Proust* is this: life is essentially a matter of suffering, and yet we as individuals are driven by the will not to suffer. In short, we seek to avoid knowledge of 'reality' (Beckett, 1999: 22, 33) and by doing so exacerbate our own, and other's, suffering. In the three ascetic tragedies of his middle period, Beckett sets out a solution to this problem. The role of art, as repeatedly, and systematically evinced in Beckett's

ascetic tragedies, is to convey both effective, and ineffective, methods for breaking one's own will with knowledge of suffering. Beckett conveys the success of an ascetic method by depicting the individual will's resignation – i.e. in 'modern' tragic terms, and Beckett conveys the failure of an ascetic method by depicting the individual will's determination to endure – i.e. in 'ancient' tragic terms.

To this end – that of causing the individual will to suffer – there are numerous examples of the destructive effect of involuntary memory in Beckett's theatre of asceticism. These painful moments where the intellect recalls 'the total past sensation, not its echo nor its copy, but the sensation itself' (Beckett, 1999: 72-3; see also Ackerley, 2009) occur after a sustained refusal on the intellect's part to function habitually, that is, to either perceive or to recall in a manner that protects the will from suffering.

We saw earlier in *Waiting for Godot* that when the intellect, Estragon, habitually remembers the maps of the Holy Land he does so in such a way that it provides some comfort to his willing subject, Vladimir, namely as to the possibility of future happiness: 'We'll swim. We'll be happy' (Beckett, 1956: 12). When later recalling in an involuntary way, however, Estragon provides for an unwanted awareness of past distress:

> Do you remember the day I threw myself into the Rhône? (Beckett, 1956: 53).

Here the past self, previously presented to the will in the *voluntary* memory of the Dead Sea recollection as one who longed to swim, is now presented in *involuntary* memory as one who wanted to drown.

Similarly, in *Endgame*, the intellect, Clov, challenges the benevolent self-perception of Hamm's self-aggrandizing chronicle by presenting an alternative version of past events in which Hamm is shown to be cold-hearted:

HAMM: Go and get two bicycle-wheels.

CLOV: There are no more bicycle-wheels.

HAMM: What have you done with your bicycle?

CLOV: I never had a bicycle.

HAMM: The thing is impossible.

CLOV: When there were still bicycles I wept to have one. I crawled at your feet. You told me to get out to hell. Now there are none (Beckett, 1958: 15).

Finally in *Happy Days*, Winnie is forced to remember her traumatic childhood when her 'husband' Willie refuses to assist his 'wife' in her lifelong quest to ignore her own pain:

WINNIE: What now, Willie? [*Long pause.*] There is my story of course, when all else fails.

'All else' is Winnie's way of describing habitual thought; thoughts that distract her from the memories of her own earlier suffering. Willie's refusal to provide a motive in the form of a distraction results in Winnie involuntarily recounting her 'story' of undressing a doll, and a having mouse run up her leg, which causes her to scream in fright (Beckett, 1961: 26-28).

In these examples of Beckettian involuntary memory we observe the purpose to which Beckett employs this particular type of remembering: to 'accentuate the desolation of the present' (Ackerley, 2009: 70) by acknowledging the desolation of the past. Involuntary memory undermines the substance of voluntary memory. If voluntary memory assists the individual will in its goal to avoid 'the suffering of being' (Beckett, 1999: 19), involuntary memory has the opposite effect. The object of involuntary memory is the awareness of the suffering self, and the suffering other. The intention of its deliberate presentation is to have the 'will not to suffer' suffer to such an extent that it freely chooses to resign from life (WWR 1: 285).

The role of art in Beckett's aesthetics

> Suffering ... opens a window on the real and is the main condition of the artistic experience ... (Beckett, 1999: 28).

The role of art in Beckett's aesthetics is to present the aesthetic moment. The aesthetic moment in Beckett's early criticism, and in the middle-period tragedies, is the individual will's subjection to, or reception of, a painful involuntary memory, which Beckett describes as revealing 'the real', or the 'Idea' (Beckett, 1999: 33, 22).

As I have shown, the role of art in Beckett's aesthetics is to reveal the 'suffering of being (Beckett, 1999: 18-19). The Beckettian aesthetic moment is, therefore, invariably accompanied by the experience of pain. More than this, the aesthetic moment in Beckett's aesthetics is the two-fold experience of suffering: as the individual will suffers from the denial of habitual consciousness, it simultaneously becomes aware of the suffering that it had previously denied.

In addition to this, the intellect's deliberate attempts to generate involuntary memory are carried out with the intention of breaking the will, which upon gaining an understanding of its essential nature *may* freely choose to resign from life (Beckett, 1958: 50; cf. WWR 1: 285, 395).

Of the many similarities and differences that have been documented in Schopenhauerian and Beckettian aesthetics (see, for example, Pothast, 2008: 81-86) the *apparent* divergence of Beckett and Schopenhauer regarding the aesthetic state as a condition of suffering has yet to be explored. As we have seen, for Schopenhauer ordinary consciousness, that is, consciousness subject to the principal of sufficient reason, is one of suffering due to its anxious nature:

> ... care for the constantly demanding will ... continually fills and moves consciousness (WWR 1: 196).

Beckett, however, describes ordinary consciousness, where one functions habitually, as the way the individual will avoids suffering. Thus ordinary consciousness in Beckett's aesthetics is equated to boredom:

> Boredom... that must be considered as the most tolerable because most durable of human evils (Beckett, 1999: 28).

Conversely, in Schopenhauerian thought the aesthetic state brings with it a sense of peace, as the willing aspect of oneself is forgotten, that is:

> ...we *lose* ourselves entirely in [the] object... we forget our individuality, our will, and continue to exist as the pure subject, as the clear mirror of the object... (WWR 1: 178; see also WWR 1: 196, 199).

In Beckett's aesthetics the aesthetic consciousness is the state in which 'for the moment the boredom of living is replaced by the suffering of being' (Beckett, 1999: 19). Far from being rid of ourselves (WWR 1: 390), in the Beckettian aesthetic state the subject is more *there* than ever, that is, is more aware of itself, than is the case in ordinary, habitual consciousness. Indeed, in the Beckettian aesthetic state the individual will suffers because of increased self-knowledge, or, in other words, for becoming self-aware. For as we have seen, this 'uncensored view of life' presented in the aesthetic state includes 'psychologically unpleasant elements' (Acheson, 1978: 170, 169) normally filtered by Habit.

At first glance, then, Beckett's aesthetics appears to be something of an inversion of the aesthetics one find in Schopenhauerian thought: ordinary consciousness is portrayed as an attempt by the individual 'will not to suffer' to filter out harmful information. Aesthetic consciousness, on the other hand, is suffering consciousness for the very fact that one perceives in such a way as to acknowledge this delimitation. In Beckettian scholarship this would typically signal another demarcation of Beckett's aesthetics from Schopenhauerian thought, the point where Beckett leaves Schopenhauer behind (Pothast, 2008: 5-6). In contrast to this position, I believe that this apparent divergence may in fact indicate a strong intellectual connection on Beckett's part to a particular aspect of Schopenhauerian aesthetics, namely Schopenhauerian tragic theory, and, more specifically still, Schopenhauer's understanding of the dynamically sublime. What I mean by this is that Beckett's aesthetics appears to incorporate a specific aspect of Schopenhauerian aesthetics as one of its key features.

As we saw in the previous chapter, Schopenhauer's theory of tragedy diverges from his overall aesthetic theory. For Schopenhauer, tragedy is the *only* art form that requires an active suppression of willing, or striving, on the part of the spectator. It is also the only art form that provides the will with knowledge, as it is the only art form in which the will is *present* during the aesthetic process (Vandenabeele, 2008: 199). As we recall, unlike the 'beautiful' object, which

invites will-free apprehension, the sublime object has a 'hostile relation to the human will in general, as manifested in its objectivity, the human body' (WWR 1: 201), and is generally understood as a threat to the body. Therefore the intellect must first 'consciously', and 'violently tear itself away' 'from the relations of the same object to the will which are recognized as unfavourable' (WWR 1: 202) to then be able to appreciate the Idea of which the individual object is an example. Thus there is an element of pain prior to the appreciation of the Idea. For Schopenhauer, then, tragedy is the only art form that generates knowledge and the subsequent suffering caused by that knowledge, as it is the only art form in which the will is there, in attendance, to be able to know and to suffer (Shapshay, 2012b: 23-4). Being there to suffer is the key differential between the 'sublime' and the 'beautiful' aesthetic experience, where tragedy evinces the former, and all other art forms, the latter.

In Beckett's aesthetics the sublime appears to play a far more prevalent role than it does in Schopenhauer's aesthetics: for Beckett the aesthetic state is necessarily a sublime state, for it is a state in which one *always* suffers. Indeed in Beckett's early criticism the aesthetic state is described as the moment when one experiences the 'suffering of being' (Beckett, 1999: 19). I believe that this early understanding continues on into a number of Beckett's tragic works in which Beckett employs the tragic form to display acts of deliberate will-destruction, or self-inflicted suffering. In short, Beckett's middle period tragedies appear to evoke Schopenhauer's theory of tragedy as an art form that communicates to the individual will the destructive knowledge of the true nature of existence (WWR 1: 253).

Given what we now know about the level of Beckett's interest in, and engagement with, Schopenhauerian thought[xxiii] the apparent influence of Schopenhauer's theory of tragedy on Beckett's middle-period tragedies, particularly Schopenhauer's insight that tragedy is analogous to the dynamically sublime (WWR 2: 433), warrants further exploration.

Beckett and the Sublime

To date, Beckett's interpreters have focussed their attention on the mathematical sublime. In particular, Beckett's work has been read in the light of the mathematical sublime in both Kantian aesthetics (see, for example, Myskja (2002); Armstrong (2002); and Tubridy (2010)) and postmodern aesthetics, particularly that of Lyotard (see, for example, Olivier (1996); Smith, (2004); Slade (2007); and Tubridy (2010)). This has a number of consequences both for Beckettian aesthetics and Beckettian ethics, the most significant of which is to again portray Beckett as an artist whose work affirms existence.

In his early critical work *Proust*, Beckett describes the aesthetic moment in language that evokes the mathematical sublime. In the aesthetic moment a person is said to experience the 'total past sensation', which 'comes in a rush to engulf the subject in all the beauty of its infallible proportion' (Beckett, 1999: 72-3). This depiction of the aesthetic state mirrors the Kantian understanding of the sublime as depicted in the *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, where the mathematically sublime object is experienced as 'contra-purposive for our cognitive faculties' (Shapshay, 2012a: 484). That is,

> In the mathematically sublime, a subject is cognitively frustrated and humbled by objects that are too vast to comprehend, and whose appearances '[bring] with them the idea of its infinity' (Shapshay, 2012a: 484 citing Kant, 2000, 138; 5: 255).

It also mirrors – for itself mirroring Kant – Schopenhauer's understanding of the mathematical sublime:

> The impression of the sublime can arise in quite a different way by our imagining a mere magnitude in space and time, whose immensity reduces the individual to nought (WWR 1: 205).

However, whilst in Beckett's early critical work the mathematical sublime is the pre-eminent aesthetic mode, by the time Beckett writes his ascetic tragedies, the mathematical sublime – where the cognitive faculties are overwhelmed by the magnitude of external forces – is a far less prevalent aesthetic mode, having been supplanted by the dynamically sublime – where the individual will is placed in a position of comprehending events that threaten it's wellbeing.[xxiv] This is a significant development in Beckett's thought. It marks the moment, I believe, when Beckett's aesthetics begins to draw upon Schopenhauer's conception of tragedy, in which the dynamically sublime plays a pivotal role. This suggests that it is necessary to investigate Schopenhauer's writings on the sublime, so as to better understand Schopenhauer's development of the dynamically sublime, and to better understand Beckett's sustained engagement with this aspect of Schopenhauerian aesthetics. In Schopenhauerian thought the dynamically sublime transitions from it's Kantian understanding – namely the moment where the subject experiences its moral power to affirm a different version of life from that given by nature (Shapshay, 2012b: 25) – to the Schopenhauerian understanding – where the sublime becomes a moment when the subject experiences its capacity to destroy its essential striving nature (WWR 2: 433).[xxv]

There are a number of implications of focussing on both the mathematical sublime in Beckett's work, and focussing on the influence of the Kantian sublime on Beckett's work. I will briefly discuss the implications of this approach here.[xxvi] The interpretive work of Myskja (2002) Armstrong, (2002), and Tubridy (2010) evince this method in relation to the works *Molloy*, *The Unnamable* and *Breath* respectively. Here the primary focus is on the Kantian sublime – primarily the mathematical sublime – and its cognitive effects:

> To experience something as sublime, then, is to experience it as having elements that defy cognition in a way that give rise to a complex feeling of pleasure and displeasure ... the aesthetic experience of the sublime is morally significant in the sense that it may contribute to moral conversion and to cultivation of character (Myskja, 2002: 1-2).

In essence, in the Kantian (mathematical) sublime moment we understand that we are able to resist nature (the empirical world), and thus are free to act according to moral law, or, that is, laws we give to ourselves, which are independent of nature (Myskja, 2002: 141). In the Kantian sublime moment we understand that we are free. Myskja subsequently reaches the conclusion that Beckettian aesthetics and ethics closely follows Kantian aesthetics and ethics because in relation to Beckett's work, Kant's theory 'is the only one that in an adequate way explains the sublime as an aesthetic judgement with moral significance' (Myskja, 2002: 8). This conclusion implicitly discounts the connection that Schopenhauer draws between the dynamically sublime, tragedy, and resignationist thought. For as we have seen, Schopenhauer believes that tragedy, which is analogous to the dynamically sublime, is able to lead the spectator towards a life of ascetic practice by alerting the spectator to his or her capacity to deny the will (WWR 1: 390). Ascetic practice is an ethical approach to suffering, as it seeks to bring suffering to a permanent end. Minus an exploration of Beckett's engagement with Schopenhauerian thought, it can be claimed that Beckett's intention, like Kant, is to provide a 'positive reaffirmation of the value of human life' (Myskja, 2002: 302). However, to include Schopenhauer's understanding of the dynamically sublime in our understanding of Beckett's aesthetics has broad implications for our understanding of Beckettian ethics as an ethic of resignation brought about through ascetic practice.[xxvii]

My ultimate position regarding Beckett and the sublime, and the present state of the literature on this subject is this: Myskja, *et al*, are correct to assert a Kantian basis to Beckett's work on the sublime. Indeed both Beckett and Schopenhauer are greatly influenced by Kant's understanding of the sublime (Beckett, 1999: 72-3; WWR 1: 205). This influence is most clearly manifested in the negative freedom to

deny one's instincts (Shapshay, 2012b: 25). However, Myskja, *et al*, present a somewhat incomplete picture of the Beckettian sublime by not also discussing Schopenhauer's development of the Kantian sublime, and Beckett's Schopenhauerian legacy. The consequence of this is that Myskja, who is otherwise correct to assert that Beckett argues in favour of the negative freedom to deny one's instinct, potentially overreaches when he subsequently argues that the negative freedom to deny permits the positive freedom to act differently. In Beckett, as in Schopenhauer, the negative freedom, the freedom not to act, appears to be an end in itself. By discounting the influence of Schopenhauer's understanding of the dynamically sublime on Beckettian aesthetics, Myskja also discounts the possibility that, like Schopenhauer, Beckett asserts a negative freedom for the purpose of destroying the individual will. Beckett, I contend, does not utilize the negative freedom to deny the will, or one's instincts, so as to then act in accordance with moral law, but rather to break the will. The Beckettian dynamically sublime provides an important formal aspect in an overall ethic of resignationism. Beckett's characters do not act differently upon the knowledge of suffering that is brought about through the intellect's denial of habitual knowledge, but rather *cease to act at all.* We may note, for example, Hamm's response to the awareness of the suffering 'Other' towards the end of *Endgame*:

> HAMM: It's the end, Clov, we've come to the end. I don't need you anymore. (Beckett, 1958: 50).

Were Hamm to be morally converted in the Kantian sense then Hamm would continue to need his intellect, Clov, to be able to act in accordance with the moral law. Indeed, Hamm would need his intellect to be able act *per se* because 'Will in itself is without consciousness...' (WWR 2: 277). That Hamm releases Clov suggests the cessation of action, a turning away from life.

The negative freedom not to act that one finds in Beckett's theatre is a freedom that Beckett's intellectual characters utilize with destructive intent. It is not, then, a

freedom that permits the subject to act morally in the Kantian sense, that is, with regard to the future. In this way, Beckett builds upon Schopenhauerian aesthetics and ethics: one holds the will at bay so as to bring about the cessation of *all* striving.

In the next section, I discuss the role of tragedy in Beckettian aesthetics. I will argue that the role of tragedy is to convey a number of effective methods for deliberately generating the aesthetic moment in the specific form of a destructive involuntary memory.

Beckett and Tragedy

In an earlier section on the subject of Beckettian aesthetics, I claimed that the central aspect of the Beckettian aesthetic is the infliction of the suffering that accompanies an involuntary memory, which is, invariably, a recollection of previously unacknowledged suffering. The role of art, then, is to generate the aesthetic moment, or involuntary memory, and, in doing so, cause the Beckettian 'will not to suffer' to suffer.

I believe the role of tragedy, more specifically, is to present a number of methods for generating the aesthetic moment, or moment of suffering. For Beckett, tragedy is a vehicle for communicating an effective ascetic method. In the three ascetic tragedies, *Waiting for Godot, Endgame*, and *Happy Days*, Beckett portrays a series of systematic attempts by the human intellect to cause its own willing aspect to suffer by involuntarily remembering moments of previously unacknowledged suffering. In addition to this, Beckettian tragedy presents a number of successful and unsuccessful ascetic methods. As such, Beckett's middle-period tragedies communicate the reason that a successful ascetic method works when it works, and the reason an unsuccessful method fails when it fails. In short, Beckettian

tragedy presents what amounts to 'best practice' for the intellect's destruction of the willing, or striving, aspect of the self.

Beckett's middle-period tragedies are a significant advancement in our understanding of the role of tragedy: by making the *deliberate* generation of self-inflicted suffering the focus of aesthetic production and contemplation, Beckett draws together aesthetics and asceticism. Beckett's unique contribution to theatre and to ascetic thought, then, is to combine the two, making the former a vehicle for the latter. As we have already seen, unlike Beckett, Schopenhauer consistently divides the aesthetic and the ascetic. Whilst observing that one sometimes leads to the other, in that an aesthetic awareness of suffering can promote subsequent ascetic practice (WWR 1: 390), at no point does Schopenhauer suggest that tragedy is the revelation of an ascetic method. Whereas Schopenhauer believes that art can lead one up to the path to salvation (WWR 1: 390) by promoting ascetic practice, the very subject matter of Beckettian tragedy is ascetic practice. Beckett is not content to lead one up to the path to salvation but, rather, guides the audience along it.

Beckett' tragedies, then, not only inform us about the fundamental problem of willing, they also inform us about what needs to be done about this fundamental problem. In Schopenhauerian tragic theory the suffering experienced by the protagonist is said to guide the audience to an appropriate attitude towards want and desire (WWR 1: 253). In Beckettian tragedy, Beckett stages the next phase of this realisation—namely the human intellect's deliberate attempts to harm its own individual will in an attempt to halt the will's striving. By doing so, Beckett turns deliberate self-harm into art, and art into deliberate self-harm. Each tragedy in Beckett's theatre of asceticism outlines a variety of tactics for providing the willing aspect with adequate knowledge of its true nature for the purpose of 'overcoming and annihilating the world' (WWR 1: 330). In each tragedy, the dynamically sublime is shown to be an essential component in this 'overcoming'. In Beckett's hands, the dynamically sublime transitions from an important aspect of aesthetics, to an important feature of a unique ascetic method.

That Beckett employs the medium of tragedy to display acts of ascetic practice, or, in other words, an individual's attempts to break his or her own will, draws our attention to another way that Beckettian tragedy appears to both utilize and develop Schopenhauerian thought. We saw in the previous chapter that for Schopenhauer the explicit subject matter of tragedy is the misery (WWR 1: 253) that human beings inflict upon one another as they each attempt to appease the unappeasable will-to-life. Building upon this understanding, Beckettian tragedy is the next step in the process of understanding the world as a place full of misery. On Beckett's stage, we witness not the 'war' (Weller, 2005: 151) of discrete individuals, but the war *within* the individual, the war between the ascetic intellect and the will not to suffer. Beckettian tragedy can be understood as the individual's response to Schopenhauer's ontological claim regarding the cause of suffering. Whereas Schopenhauer states the problem – that suffering is caused by one's striving – Beckett's tragedies reveal a number of attempts to resolve this problem. Thus whilst Schopenhauer views tragedy's role as the diagnosis of one's illness, Beckett understands the role of tragedy as 'treatment' for that illness. To this end, Beckettian tragedy consistently displays the individual as an individual divided into aspects. These aspects are those of the intellect, and the individual will. The essential 'mode' of Beckettian tragedy is that in which the intellect attempts to reveal to its own individual 'will not to suffer' the suffering it has caused, or endured. The intellect does this with the intention of placing the individual will in such a position of self-understanding that it freely chooses to turn its back on life.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that the role of art in Beckett's aesthetics is to generate the aesthetic moment, or involuntary memory, which in Beckett's aesthetics occurs as a result of the intellect's refusal to provide the individual will with habitual material. In addition to this I have argued that the role of tragedy

more specifically is to provide guidance on the subject of successful and unsuccessful methods for deliberately generating the aesthetic moment.

Central to the intellect's deliberate generation of the aesthetic moment in the form of an involuntary memory is the utilization of the dynamically sublime as an ascetic method. The intellect's negative freedom not to act, which one finds in Beckettian tragedy, is used for the purpose of precluding further willing, and thus further suffering.

In this chapter I have also described the development of the role of tragedy that one finds in Beckett's tragedies. Whereas Schopenhauer believes that tragedy reveals the antagonism of the will with itself (WWR 1: 253), that is, tragedy reveals the *individual* objectifications of the will at war with each other, Beckett's tragedies reveal the *interiority* of the war within the individual. Beckettian tragedy can be understood as a response to the awareness that the striving, or willing, aspect of the self is the cause of suffering.

In the next chapter I present a discussion of the significance of Schopenhauer's subjects of the 'I' – the willing and knowing subjects – in the formation of the Beckettian tragic 'pseudocouple'.

PART THREE:

Schopenhauerian and Beckettian Ontology and Epistemology

Chapter 5: Ontology – The Subject Of Willing

Introduction

Thus far I have made a number of claims regarding the importance of Schopenhauerian ontology, epistemology, aesthetics, and ethics in the generation of the three Beckett tragedies, *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*, and *Happy Days*. The following discussion elaborates upon this interpretative framework.

I believe it can be argued that Beckett's tragic pseudocouples are a sustained engagement with Schopenhauer's ontological and epistemological understanding of the 'I' as an entity which possesses aspects of willing and knowing, or bodily drives and intellect. In developing the means to express the process of ascetic practice as a war between one's intellect and one's drives, Beckett repeatedly draws upon Schopenhauer's conception of the divided self. I believe this conceptual framework assists us to understand the 'war' that takes place between Beckett's pseudocouples, as well as the unusual tactics that are used during the conduct of that war.

Whereas Schopenhauer uses the term 'subject of willing' to describe the primary, striving, aspect of the self, I believe that Beckett, having earlier described this same aspect as the 'will not to suffer', now uses the pronouns Pozzo, Vladimir, Hamm, Nagg, Winnie and Mr. Shower, or Cooker. That is, in the tragedies of Beckett's middle period we witness an ongoing development of the Beckettian will not to suffer in relation to the Schopenhauerian will to life. In turn, whereas Schopenhauer uses the term 'subject of knowing' to describe the tertiary aspect of the self, that which serves the will by providing representations in space and time,

Beckett names this aspect Lucky, Estragon, Clov, Nell, Willie, and Mrs. Shower, or Cooker.

Essentially, it is my contention that Beckett utilizes the key features of Schopenhauer's subjects of willing and knowing to convey an ascetic method. At the heart of this unique Beckettian ascetic method is the knowing subject's refusal to perform its servile function of providing the will not to suffer with habitual knowledge, or, in other words, a representation of the world situated in space and time.

To establish the veracity of the claim that there is a Schopenhauerian ontological and epistemological basis to the Beckettian tragic pseudocouple one needs to set out the pertinent aspects of Schopenhauer's ontology and epistemology.[xxviii] To this end, I shall set out Schopenhauer's claims about the essential nature of the will-to-life, which Schopenhauer argues is to strive in a tireless, 'blind' manner. Schopenhauer also argues that the will manifests itself as a person's 'character', and that only the will-to-life has 'free will'. On each one of these points I shall draw together Schopenhauerian and Beckettian thought.

The alignment of Beckett's middle-period tragedies with Schopenhauerian ontology necessarily provides a challenge to Adorno's central claim that Beckett's tragedies refuse metaphysical meaning (Adorno, 1991: 263). Adorno's central claim regarding Beckettian 'meaninglessness' is that by refusing metaphysical meaning, that is, by refusing foundational meaning, Beckettian tragedy precludes other kinds of meaning that would otherwise inhere in the work, such as the form and content (Adorno, 1991: 242). Denied the support of the metaphysical foundation, the idea of meaning itself collapses (Adorno, 1991: 263). Therefore, one can no longer say that this scene means this, or that this sentence suggests this because the very intention of the work is to prohibit assertions of this kind.

My central argument regarding Beckettian ontology is that thinkers such as Adorno have not sufficiently taken into account Beckett's early critical work. A number of claims that Beckett makes in his interpretation of Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* with regard to the 'will not to suffer' are foundational claims that Beckett continues to build upon throughout his oeuvre. The will not to suffer of *Proust* is further developed in the tragedies of Beckett's middle period. I argue that in *Waiting for Godot, Endgame,* and *Happy Days* the very problem of Beckettian tragedy is the destruction of one's ontological basis. In addition to this, I also argue that it is the process of refusing the will's demands for habitual knowledge that forms the basis to the action, or inaction, on the Beckettian stage. Essentially, then, my argument is this: The metaphysical basis to Beckett's middle-period tragedies is the 'will not to suffer'. The form of Beckett's middle-period tragedies is that of the intellect's attempts to 'break' the will not to suffer. The content of Beckett's middle-period tragedies reveals this ethical, self-destructive, process.

In the next chapter (Chapter 6) I establish the key aspects of Schopenhauerian epistemology. I discuss Schopenhauer's claim that the intellect is the tertiary aspect of the self, a mere 'servant' of the will' (WWR 1: 176; WWR 2: 216-217), the essential purpose of which is to furnish the will with representations in space and time. Again, on each point I shall explicate Beckett's utilization of Schopenhauerian epistemology in the formation of the intellectual aspect of his theatrical pseudocouples.

The task of aligning Beckett's pseudocouples with Schopenhauer's subjects that constitute the 'I' is not a straightforward undertaking. On each occasion that we are introduced to the world of a Beckettian pseudocouple it is *during* the heat of battle, not *before* the outbreak of hostility, but as the war is being fought. Whereas Schopenhauerian ontology and epistemology describes the willing and knowing subject's normal roles,[xxix] that is, their typical function prior to battle – where the willing subject is master, and the knowing subject is servant – Beckettian tragedy largely eschews the depiction of the intellect's typical functioning, and for the most

part focuses on depicting the intellect's attempts to destroy the servile relationship that exists between it and the will. It is my contention, then, that the war we witness on the Beckettian stage may be understood as 'asceticism', or the 'intentional mortification of one's own will' (WWR 2: 613). In Beckettian ascetic practice, the knowing subject refuses to provide motives to the will with the intention of causing the will to suffer. In turn the willing subject harangues the knowing subject for habitual information about the world – that is, delimiting knowledge of particularities which are positioned in space and time – so that it may avoid 'the suffering of being' (Beckett, 1999: 18-19), or, in other words, avoid any knowledge which challenges the egocentric self-understanding of the individual will.

To understand the *way* each battle is fought – to understand the *tactics* that we see on the Beckettian stage – one must understand the capabilities that each combatant naturally possesses. The next two chapters will set out the essential nature of each 'side'.

Warring opposites: the two parties to Beckett's tragic pseudocouples

A good deal of interpretive work has already been carried out on the subject of Beckett's repeated utilization of often 'antagonistic' or 'warring' couples (Weller, 2006: 78). In this chapter I shall contribute to this body of research by exploring another model for Beckett's pseudocouples, namely the subjects of the 'I' as elucidated in Schopenhauerian thought. However, before I elaborate upon this ontological and epistemological model, I shall first briefly discuss the existing frameworks that have been established for understanding Beckett's pseudocouples.

At present, the interpretive work on the subject of the Beckettian 'pseudocouple' – a concept first raised by Beckett in *The Unnamable* (first published in French 1953) – can be divided into two broad schools of thought. The first school portrays the pseudocouple as the product of an antagonistic union of separate individuals that depend upon one another for the attainment of their goals, and for the maintenance of their identity. This interpretive framework argues that hostility in Beckett's work is engendered by the irresolvable tension caused by irreconcilable difference and mutual dependence; often positioning Beckett's concept of the pseudocouple within the post-Nietzschean, and poststructuralist philosophical concern with alterity and the 'other', as well as identity aspects of Hegelian and Marxist thought.[xxx]

Such readings attempt to ground Beckett's work in the push and pull world of human relations:

> Who are these people? Where are they, and how did they get there? What can illuminate their mood of bewilderment as well as their mood of appalling comprehension? What is the source of their ugly power over one another, and of their impotence? What gives to their conversation its sound, at once of madness and of plainness? (Cavell, 2002: 117).

Here, then, the term 'pseudocouple' refers to the problematic nature of a perennially strained, yet necessary *external* relationship.

In contrast to this understanding, the second school of thought regarding the nature of Beckett's pseudocouples positions Beckett's work as an exploration of something that is prior to, and thus subsequently affects, human interaction, namely the push and pull of the relationships *within* the individual. One might call this the primary relationship.

The second school of thought understands the pseudocouple in terms of the individual psyche. Here the pseudocouple has been conceived variously as a war between ego and alter ego (Little, 1978), a war between the intellect and the emotions (Esslin, 1961), a forum for presenting Beckett's challenge to Descartes' assertions regarding the knowability of one's own mind (Weller, 2006), and a case of Freudian projection – where an 'other' is needed for the purpose of seeing he or she who projects that other in a favourable light (Baroghel, 2010). A common thread of these diverse readings is that the theatrical pseudocouple is one person, a single entity.

A significant aspect of the latter schools' understanding of Beckett's work, then, is that the events of the drama take place *within* the skull. In his seminal work on Beckettian theatre, *Theatre of the Absurd* (1961), Martin Esslin describes this 'situation' as one of 'monodrama', where in the play *Endgame* the physical space of the stage resembles a human head. With two windows as eyes looking out upon the world, and with hated parents deposited in ash cans much like the mind stores away unwanted 'memories', the audience is encouraged to understand the events as occurring inside a person's mind (Esslin, 1961: 50-51; see also Kenner in Boxall, 2000: 75; Chambers, 1976: 7).

Rather than depicting an exterior alterity, then, as Beckett's pseudocouple is otherwise held to do, the second school of thought argues that the pseudocouples of Beckettian theatre reveal an *interiority*—in particular the to and fro of incessant demand and response.

It is the second schools' understanding of Beckett's pseudocouples that I seek to build upon with the following analysis. Beckett's work is concerned with interiority, with *introspection*. The events that occur on the stage in *Waiting for Godot, Endgame,* and *Happy Days* occur within the skull. There is, however, a point where my own work diverges from the second school of thought. Whereas many of the thinkers in this school have focused their attention on the mind alone –

emotions and intellect, ego and alter-ego, and so on – I believe it is important to understand the 'skull' in Beckettian theatre as the 'venue' for processing and aiding the drives of the body (see Esslin, 1961: 36, 50, 51), or, indeed, for hindering that process, as is so often the case in Beckett's work. The Beckettian stage as mind, then, is the place where the battle between the individual will not to suffer and the individual will's intellect is played out.

What the audience to a Beckett tragedy witnesses is self-consciousness, the process where the Beckettian 'will not to suffer' (Beckett, 1999: 43) becomes an object for the Beckettian intellect. This epistemological model appears to engage with an important aspect of Schopenhauerian epistemology, namely the fourth class of object in the *Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*. As the *Fourfold Root* is discussed at length in the next chapter it will suffice to say that Schopenhauer believes that there are four kinds of object in the world – empirical objects, concepts, space and time, and the human will – because these are the objects that the intellect is capable of forming. In the fourth class of object, Schopenhauer argues that in introspection the willing subject becomes an object for the knowing subject (WWR 2: 202), that is, in introspection the intellect understands bodily desires, or feelings, as its own wants and needs. Uniquely, I believe, Beckett gives a voice to these feelings by in turn giving a voice to the will (O'Hara, 1981: 265, 267). Importantly, then, for the formation of the 'I', or the unity of the two aspects of the self, the intellect here 'apprehends itself as identical with its own basis from which it has sprung, i.e., with what wills' (WWR 2: 277). The intellect understands the pleasure and pain experienced by the will in response to the presentation of motives by the intellect as its own feelings of pleasure or pain. In turn, the willing subject conceives of the knowledge presented to it by the intellect as self-knowledge. Schopenhauer describes this mutual self-recognition as the 'world-knot' (1974a: 212). The Schopenhauerian 'I' is a pseudocouple, then, to borrow Beckett's term, because it is a 'unity with two aspects', aspects that coincide because they are 'two parts of the one whole' (Atwell, 1995: 26).[xxxi]

This understanding of the 'I' has a great deal of significance for our understanding of Beckettian tragedy: as spectators to a Beckettian tragedy we watch events occurring inside a person's mind. In turn these events are instances of introspection, where the knowing subject 'watches', or is 'conscious of' (Atwell, 1995: 27) another aspect of itself, namely its willing subject. Here the willing subject makes demands of its intellect for representations of the world. In response to these demands, the knowing subject attempts to refuse to provide a clear picture of the world, or a picture that will permit the will to strive, and to avoid suffering.[xxxii]

In line with the second school of thought it is my claim that the Beckettian pseudocouple is a single entity. With regard to the term 'pseudocouple', the prefix 'pseudo' refers to the fact that the 'couple' is not a couple at all. Rather, Beckett's tragic pseudocouples are *aspects* of a single entity, a single entity metaphorically divided on the stage for the purpose of understanding these aspects. By dividing the self into aspects of willing and knowing, Beckett performs a metaphorical division of the self comparable to that of Schopenhauer in his main work, *The World as Will and Representation*. As Schopenhauer believes that everything that exists is the one 'will', consciousness must also be a form of will (Aquila, 1993: 245-6; Atwell, 1995: 211). So as to better understand the way that will *with* intellect functions, Schopenhauer attempts to pull apart this single entity – thus dividing will *with* intellect into will *and* intellect. It is this approach to self-understanding, namely to divide the self for the purpose of self-understanding, that I believe Beckett subsequently utilizes.[xxxiii]

It is my argument, then, that the character that Beckett names 'Pozzo', for example, can be understood as functioning in an analogous way to Schopenhauer's willing subject, as in turn 'Lucky', can be understood as manifesting characteristics that permit him to be read as an engagement on Beckett's part with Schopenhauer's concept of the knowing subject. Together, Pozzo and Lucky combine to form the 'I' of Pozzo-Lucky, where the willing subject, Pozzo, acquires self-knowledge because

he perceives the intellect, Lucky, as his own intellect, and, in turn, the knowing subject, Lucky, perceives the will in self-consciousness as his *own* will.

The Beckettian pseudocouple's connection to Schopenhauer's subjects of the 'I' is at its most palpable in Beckett's evocation of the manner in which Pozzo and Lucky are connected, that is by a rope around Lucky's neck. The nature, or effect, of Schopenhauer's 'world-knot' (Schopenhauer 1974a: 212), where the intellect and will intertwine, is there for Vladimir and Estragon to see. At the very point where Pozzo and Lucky 'meet', a running sore weeps:

ESTRAGON: Oh I say.

VLADIMIR: A running sore!

ESTRAGON: It's the rope.

VLADIMIR: It's the rubbing.

ESTRAGON: It's inevitable.

VLADIMIR: It's the knot (Beckett, 1956: 25).

Without the 'knot' that binds the willing and knowing subject the world as representation would not exist. It is, I argue, the foremost intention of Beckettian asceticism to untie the world-knot, and by so doing return to a state of 'nothingness' (WWR 1: 411).

Understanding Beckett's pseudocouples in the light of Schopenhauer's subjects of the 'I', which are manifestations of Schopenhauer's ontology and epistemology, in turn makes it possible to read Beckett's pseudocouples as manifestations of Beckett's own work in these philosophical subject areas. In addition to this, it suggests that Beckettian metaphysics and epistemology builds upon a Schopenhauerian foundation. Beckett's sustained engagement with, and

subsequent utilization of, Schopenhauerian thought is not undertaken merely as a means of parodying Schopenhauer's negation of the will to life, as Adorno (1991: 269) suggests, but is undertaken in the manner of a serious investigation into the matter of developing effective ascetic practice.

With these broad claims in place I shall now proceed to an explication of Schopenhauer's ontology and epistemology, focusing on the specific aspects upon which Beckett appears to draw in the formation of his tragic pseudocouples.

The world as will and representation – the subject of willing and the subject of knowing

In Schopenhauerian thought the 'I' is presented as two distinct, yet complimentary *aspects*: the 'will' and the 'intellect', or the subject of willing, and the subject of knowing.

As the willing subject, one is 'the most articulate manifestation of the blindly striving drive that underlies all reality'. Whilst as the knowing subject, one is also the 'ineliminable and indispensable formal condition of objects of all kinds' (Zöller, 1999: 20). In technical terms, then – for Schopenhauer tends to describe his theory of the self in an admixture of both technical and metaphorical language – the willing and knowing subjects are the very possibility of all feeling and all knowing respectively. The willing and knowing subjects, therefore, are not experienced, are not objects of experience (Janaway, 1989: 118, 122, 123, 264), but, rather, are the reasons that we are able to feel and to represent:

> the two subjects are the inseparable poles of an original complex unity on the basis of which all intellection and volition comes to pass (Zöller, 1999: 25)

Were it not for the poles of this unity, one would be incapable of having particular moments of experience, that is moments of 'knowing' and moments of 'willing'.

In another sense we may understand the willing subject as the ontologically primary, essence of human beings, whilst the knowing subject is the mere 'accident' generated by the will's striving, which in turn has permitted the will to strive more effectively (WWR 2: 201). Finally, and here we find Schopenhauer at his most metaphorical, will may be understood as 'heat', and intellect as the 'light' inadvertently generated by that 'heat' (WWR 2: 201). I begin this review of the subjects of the 'I' by elucidating the nature of one's primary stuff (Atwell, 1990: 14; see WWR 2: 239): the subject of willing. Schopenhauer's understanding of one's essential nature is, I believe, an illuminating way of conceiving of a number of Beckett's characters, namely Vladimir, Pozzo, Hamm, Nagg, Winnie, and Mr. Shower or Cooker.

The World as Will: The Subject of Willing

The Schopenhauerian 'will' is the 'inner nature of all things in the world' (WWR 2: 349)', 'the kernel of reality itself' (WWR 2: 351). The same will we find within ourselves upon introspection, which in self-consciousness we feel as a 'blind' impulse (WWR 1: 164, 180), an irresistible urge (WWR 1: 275), and an unquenchable thirst (WWR 1: 312) is also objectified in the phenomenal realm as non-rational animal life, and life without consciousness. The will also objectifies itself in the forces of nature, such as gravity and electromagnetism (WWR: 117).

Thus it is the *same* will that 'appears in every blindly acting force of nature, and also in the deliberate conduct of man' (WWR 1: 110).

There is some debate as to whether or not Beckett subscribes to the idea that the will described in *Proust* is the essential nature of *everything* that exists. As we have already seen, the early Adornian interpretation of Beckettian tragedy argues the complete absence of an ontological basis to Beckett's work (Adorno, 1991: 242, 263). Deviating from this absolute position, Pothast, for example, (2008: 124) argues that Beckett suggests a shared ontological basis to human experience, however there is little in Beckett's work to suggest that Beckett understands the will as anything other than the essential aspect of the individual human being. It has also been argued that Beckett's understanding of the Schopenhauerian will is more in keeping with Schopenhauer's all-encompassing ontology:

> The extent to which Schopenhauer's thought has been assimilated by Beckett in his work is in fact astonishing. This does not only apply to Schopenhauer's aesthetic, but to his philosophy of the unrepresentable will in all its ramifications (Olivier, 1996: 344).

I believe there are a number of instances in Beckett's tragedies where Beckett alludes to the idea that willful perception is a 'caricature' (Beckett, 1999: 14) and that in reality all is one. As Beckett argues that the essence of humanity is will, it follows that if all is 'one' then the essence of all is 'will'.

That Beckett appears to argue that all is 'one' is revealed in the moments when the Beckettian intellect attempts to convey the unity of existence to the willing subject. For example, in *Endgame*, when the intellect, Clov is compelled by his willing subject to look out of the window, Clov wonders which version of the world it is that Hamm wishes to see:

CLOV: Any particular sector you fancy? Or merely the whole thing? (Beckett, 1958: 47)

In other words, Clov is enquiring as to whether Hamm wishes him to perceive as an individual, and thus understand the world as broken up into parts, or 'aesthetically' that is, in a manner that understands the world as a single entity, or substance.

In the play *Happy Days*, when Willie is berated by Winnie to let her know how she ought describe her hair, either 'them or it', Willie eventually replies 'It' (Beckett, 1961: 9). Whilst an apparently trivial moment, where the will has again provoked a response from its knowing subject, it is possible to read this passage as a moment where the intellect attempts to show that something can be perceived in two ways. In the first way, when perceiving egoistically, Winnie's hair is comprised of many separate strands. When perceiving aesthetically, when seeing beyond the 'caricature' of the world as representation, which occurs in space and time, everything is a singular 'it', i.e., 'one', as opposed to the plural 'they'.

That everything is essentially 'one' is also revealed in Pozzo's soliloquy, which occurs towards the end of Act II of *Waiting for Godot*:

POZZO: (*suddenly furious*). Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time! It's abominable! When! When! One day, is that not enough for you, one day like any other day, one day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second, is that not enough for you? (*Calmer*). They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more (Beckett, 1956: 89).

Here Pozzo recounts the knowledge that he has received once seeing beyond the illusion of individuality: all is 'one'.

My central point relates to a claim made by Schopenhauer in regard to one's position on the unity of existence. As it is my claim that Beckettian tragedy is the evocation of ascetic practice, this claim also carries with it a number of other claims that relate to the advocacy of life-denial:

> Quietism, i.e., the giving up of all willing, asceticism, i.e., intentional mortification of one's own will, and mysticism, i.e., consciousness of the identity of one's own inner being with that of all things, or with the kernel of the world, stand in the closest connexion, so that whoever professes one of them is gradually led to the acceptance of the others, even against his intention (WWR 2: 613).

By arguing two points, namely that all is 'one', and that the essence of human beings is 'will', Beckett in effect appears to advocate that all is will. We thus have the interconnected basis to Beckettian quietism. By understanding the world as 'one' thing, the 'will', and that this one thing is the cause of all suffering, this in turn leads to asceticism – the mortification of the will – and ultimately the giving up of all willing, or 'quietism'.[xxxiv] This is an interpretation of Beckettian thought that becomes clear with the removal of the life-affirming interpretive lens that presents Beckett as an artist whose work affirms 'difference'. Having presented an alternative understanding of Beckett's position on the universality of the will, I now return to Schopenhauer's conception of the will-to-life.

It is because all forms of existence are objectifications of the one, essentially undifferentiated, will (WWR 1: 128) that all share its inner nature: to strive tirelessly, and without purpose. As 'blind', or 'ateleological and arational,' (Atwell,

1990: 150) striving is the very nature of the will, when the will objectifies itself it necessarily does so as an individual thing that strives and strives without an *ultimate* aim (WWR 1: 275; Janaway, 1999a: 325).

In human beings, as with everything else that exists, the will is the 'primary', or 'original' (WWR 1: 292), aspect of the organism, and of the self:

> ... in all animal beings the will is the primary and substantial thing; the intellect, on the other hand, is something secondary and additional... (WWR 2: 205).

Thus intellect – or *objectively*, the 'brain' – comes about because the will, as it becomes more and more complicated, requires an intellect to function effectively.

Prior to Schopenhauerian philosophy the cognitive, intellectual, side of life was held to be the essential, primary, aspect of humanity. The ability to reason defined the fundamental nature of humanity, and, given that this capacity was found nowhere else in the natural world, it was held to differentiate us from the rest of nature. The will was held to exist as a controllable means of carrying out our thoughts (WWR 1: 293). Schopenhauer reverses this formulation, and holds our underlying drives, our arational, conative self, to be the principal aspect of what we are. With this the intellect is reduced to a mere function of the brain, an 'accident' (WWR 2: 201) of the will's ceaseless striving, a secondary feature of the self that acts as a mere 'servant' and 'instrument' of the will (WWR 2: 216; 641; See Zöller, 1999: 19; Gardner 1999: 376):

> The first step in the fundamental knowledge of my metaphysics is that the will we find within us does not, as philosophy previously assumed, proceed first of all from knowledge; that it is not, in fact, a mere

> modification of knowledge, and thus something secondary, derived, and like knowledge itself, conditioned by the brain; but that it is the *prius* of knowledge, the kernel of our true being (WWR 2: 293).

Schopenhauer's ultimate point about the primary nature of the will is that whilst actions in the natural world may be guided by intellect, that is, by the light of consciousness, intellect is not a necessary and essential condition of the will's activity:

> The will, as thing-in-itself, constitutes the inner, true, and indestructible nature of man; yet in itself it is without consciousness... (WWR 2: 201).

Indeed, much of life 'strives blindly in a dull, one-sided and unalterable fashion (WWR 1: 118).' Most willing is simply not accompanied by consciousness, or directed to conscious ends (WWR 2: 135-6). Here Schopenhauer refers to the behaviour of plants, and the inorganic world, but also to our own 'vegetative' nature, i.e., growth, digestion, circulation, reproduction, and so on (WWR 1: 115; Magee, 1997: 138).

The will, then, is the primary feature of the self in the form of the willing subject, and the fundamental nature of this primary aspect, the way it manifests itself in the phenomenal realm is as the 'will-to-life':

> What the will wills is life. Thus the will may be called the will to life (WWR 1: 275).

> [The will-to-life is the] premise of all premises ... the world appears as a consequence of the will-to-life (WWR 2: 360).

Will as Sexual Aspect

The sentient individual experiences his or her essential being as the compulsion to maintain his or her bodily self, and to perpetuate the species of the thing of which he or she is an instantiation (WWR 1: 327; WWR 2: Chapter 44; Janaway, 1989: 7; Janaway, 1999a: 325; Young, 2005: 243).

> That which makes itself known to the individual consciousness as sexual impulse in general, and without direction to a definite individual of the other sex, is in itself, and apart from the phenomenon, simply the will-to-life. But what appears in consciousness as sexual impulse, directed to a definite individual, is in itself the will-to-life as a precisely determined individual (WWR 2: 535).

The genitals, then, and not the intellect, are 'the real *focus* of the will' (WWR 1: 330; see also O'Hara, 1981: 260). Thus it is that in Schopenhauer we observe a tension between the individual's intellectual life and the drives of the body; the former, by providing the knowledge that all life is essentially 'one' undifferentiated thing, holds out the possibility of suppressing the will, the latter, on the other hand perpetuates the will by providing it with more and more individuals with which to strive: 'The genitals are the life-preserving principle assuring to time endless life' (WWR 1: 330).

In his theatre of asceticism, it can be argued that Beckett demarcates certain characters as 'will' through their connection to sexual desire. We may typically understand one half of each Beckettian pseudocouple as willing subject by

Beckett's associating him or her with the will-to-life's sexual aspect and the ultimate focus on procreation.

In *Waiting for Godot*, Vladimir is the bearer of the Vladimir-Estragon pseudocouple's sexual aspect. Beckett signifies this in a number of ways, the most frequent of which is through Vladimir's defective prostate, which is, of course, part of the male reproductive system (Beckett, 1956: 10, 11, 16, 35, 59). So dominant is the species-perpetuating aspect of the will to life (WWR 1: 276) that even the prospect of death by hanging is accompanied, or motivated, by a sexual element:

VLADIMIR: What do we do now?

ESTRAGON: Wait.

VLADIMIR: Yes, but while waiting.

ESTRAGON: What about hanging ourselves?

VLADIMIR: Hmm. It'd give us an erection!

ESTRAGON: (*highly excited)*). An erection!

VLADIMIR: With all that follows (Beckett, 1956: 17).

Similarly, in *Endgame*, Beckett designates Hamm as willing subject, and therefore as sexual aspect, through the motif of intercourse and propagation. First we witness Hamm's personal longing:

HAMM: Quiet, quiet you're keeping me awake. (*Pause.*) Talk softer. (*Pause.*) If I could sleep I might make love (Beckett, 1958: 19).

And later, Hamm reminisces about one of his neighbours, Mother Pegg:

HAMM: She was bonny once, like a flower of the field. (*With reminiscent leer.*) And a great one for the men! (Beckett, 1958: 31).

In addition to Hamm's own urges, he also espouses a wish for overall fertility. Despite the barrenness of life inside the bunker, Hamm still holds out hope that life outside continues unabated:

HAMM: But beyond the hills? Eh? Perhaps it's still green. Eh? (*Pause.*) Flora! Pomona! (*Ecstatically.*) Ceres! (Beckett, 1958: 30).

Flora, of course, is the Roman goddess of flowers and spring. Pomona is the Roman goddess of fruitful abundance, and Ceres is the Roman goddess of agriculture and crops. In short, all are mythical goddesses of fertility.

Similarly we may understand *Endgame's* other willing subject, Nagg, as willing subject through his being depicted as possessing a sexual aspect. Nell's first question upon being roused by her willing subject, Nagg, involves his essential sexual function (WWR 1: 330):

NELL: What is it, my pet? (*Pause.*) Is it time for love? (Beckett, 1958: 18).

In *Happy Days*, Beckett emphasises the willing subject, Winnie's, sexual aspect by drawing attention to her physical appearance in the stage directions:

> WINNIE. *About fifty, well-preserved, blonde for preference, plump, arms and shoulders bare, low bodice, big bosom, pearl necklace* (Beckett, 1961: 1).

Winnie is further denoted as willing subject by the way she attempts to maintain her appearance, by brushing her hair, applying lipstick, and clipping her fingernails (Beckett, 1961: 4-5, 8, 18).

The character of Mr. Shower or Cooker is denoted as *Happy Days'* other willing subject through his objectification and sexualisation of the immobilised Winnie:

> Can't have been a bad bosom, he says, in its day. [*Pause.*] Seen worse shoulders, he says, in my time (Beckett, 1961: 28).

Mr. Shower or Cooker also wishes to know whether or not Winnie can still feel her legs, and whether she is wearing any clothes under the mound of earth. Most importantly he twice asks Mrs. Shower or Cooker 'what good' Winnie is to Willie 'like that', that is buried in such a way as to be sexually unavailable (Beckett, 1961: 20, 28). That Mr. and Mrs. Shower or Cooker's repeated appearance on the scene comes solely in the form of Winnie's recollections, or possibly fantasies, of this having occurred also draws our attention to the fact that these may be nothing more than Winnie's hopes that Willie will find her sexually attractive once more.

The will-to-life, then, in terms of self-maintenance, and perpetuation of the species, is the way that the will manifests itself in the phenomenal realm. The will wills life. However, as to why the will wills life is not a question that can be answered. The will has no ultimate objective to its insatiable desire for the perpetuation of life. In

short, when the will strives it does so in a 'blind' fashion. The will *wants* without knowing why it wants only that it wants 'without rest or aim' (WWR 1: 148-9).

Striving

Schopenhauer asserts that it is the nature of the will to strive tirelessly, that it generates innumerable individual objectifications to aid this nature (see WWR 2: 350), but that it does so for no particular purpose, with no goal in 'mind':

> In fact, absence of all aim, of all limits, belongs to the essential nature of the will itself, which is an endless striving ... the will always knows, when knowledge enlightens it, what it wills here and now, but never what it wills in general. Every individual act has a purpose or end; willing as a whole has no end in view (WWR 1: 164-5).

And, later:

> ... at all grades of its phenomenon, from lowest to the highest, the will disposes entirely with an ultimate aim and object. It always strives, because striving is its sole nature, to which no attained goal can put an end. Such striving is therefore incapable of final satisfaction. (WWR 1: 308).

It is because of this lack of ultimate aim that 'constant suffering is essential to life' (WWR 1: 283). Came describes Schopenhauer's argument in the following way:

> All self-conscious beings are characterised by an incessant and inherently painful willing. Willing is a sufficient condition of suffering, because all willing arises necessarily from want or deficiency, and to experience a want is to suffer; therefore to live is to suffer (Came, 2012: 237; see also Jacquette, 2005: 116).

It is because we are essentially 'will', and our primary nature is one of ceaseless striving that we suffer. Our very nature is the cause of our suffering (Soll, 2012: 300). As long as we are an entity that strives, we can never experience a lasting sense of peace or happiness (WWR 1: 320).

Magee perhaps best captures the consequences of Schopenhauer's metaphysics of the will for humanity when he chooses the word 'doomed' (Magee, 1983: 219). In Schopenhauer's schemata, suffering is not a contingent aspect predicated upon particular events happening to particular individuals, rather, suffering is a part of what we are (Atwell, 1990: 174):

> ... suffering is essential to life, and therefore does not flow in upon us from outside, but ... everyone carries around within himself its perennial source (WWR 1: 318).

The cause of suffering is striving. As human individuals are the embodiment of the will to life, they suffer the fate of that constitution. As the will strives tirelessly, so must we. Given this, suffering is 'our normal state of affairs' (Magee, 1983: 219). We may occasionally receive respite from the urges of the will when, for example, we reach a goal, but this peace cannot last because the will shall soon urge us to will, or to *strive* again. This being so, we never progress but, rather, move from one attempt at satisfying the will to another—or as Vladimir in *Waiting for Godot* suggests, 'resume the struggle' (Beckett, 1956: 9).

Schopenhauer's understanding of the essential nature of the will-to-life, namely that of ceaseless striving, is mirrored by Beckett in the presentation of a number of his tragic characters. As Beckettian subjects of willing, Pozzo, Vladimir, Hamm, Nagg, Winnie, and Mr. Shower, or Cooker, strive tirelessly to avoid suffering. As Vladimir continually resumes the struggle, Pozzo continually, and abusively, drives his 'carrier', Lucky, 'On' (Beckett, 1956: 22). True to his nature as an entity of ceaseless striving, Pozzo's first word is 'On!'—indeed it is also the last word we hear him speak (Beckett, 1956: 22, 89).

In *Endgame*, Hamm, the tyrannical employer, is unable, or unwilling, to cease striving, though he knows only too well that the time has come for his story to end:

> HAMM: Enough, it's time it ended, in the refuge too. (*Pause.*) And yet I hesitate, I hesitate to... to end. Yes, there it is, it's time it ended and yet I hesitate to—(*he yawns*)—to end (Beckett, 1958: 12).

Hamm's inability to 'end', or, in other words, his desire to continue striving, is perhaps best captured by the manner in which he tells his 'chronicle' (Beckett, 1958: 40)—forever embellishing his life story, forever attempting to portray himself, to himself, as a figure of benevolence. Perhaps most importantly, however, it is through Hamm's storytelling that we witness his propensity to go on, despite no longer knowing how to go on:

> HAMM: I'll soon have finished with this story. (*Pause.*) Unless I bring in other characters. (*Pause.*) But where would I find them? (*Pause.*) Where would I look for them? (*Pause. He whistles. Enter Clov.*) Let us pray to God (Beckett, 1958: 37).

And later, after having in the previous passage attempted the ultimate *Deus ex machina* by actually introducing God as a possible solution to his problems, Hamm again displays a propensity to continue his 'storytelling':

> HAMM: Perhaps I could go on with my story, end it and begin another (Beckett, 1958: 44-45).

That Hamm has a continuous, 'irresistible' (WWR 1: 275), urge to tell his story is not lost on his servant Clov, who doubts Hamm's desire to end. When compelled to inquire as to how Hamm has progressed his chronicle, Clov evinces his profound doubt that Hamm wants to conclude *per se*:

> CLOV: Will it not soon be the end?
>
> HAMM: I'm afraid it will.
>
> CLOV: Pah! You'll make up another (Beckett, 1958: 41).

Indeed, later in the play, Clov's scepticism proves to be well founded:

> CLOV: Let's stop playing.
>
> HAMM: Never! (Beckett, 1958: 49)

Whilst Hamm prolongs his 'ending', he makes continual demands of his servant Clov to report on life outside the bunker, or to, generally, satisfy his every whim. *Endgame's* other willing subject, Nagg, demands that his 'wife', Nell, recalls a series of past events, and that she listens, again and again, to Nagg's re-telling of the same terrible, terribly told, joke (Beckett, 1958: 21-22).

In *Happy Days*, it is Winnie who in the same breath exclaims that she can say no more before having to acknowledge that she must indeed 'say more' (Beckett, 1961: 3; 29), and that to this 'saying' her long-suffering 'husband', Willie, must listen and respond. 'On, Winnie' (Beckett, 1961: 3), she says at the start of Act I as though verbalizing this inner compulsion to strive. This 'On' that Winnie says – an 'On' similar to that said by Pozzo in *Waiting for Godot* (Beckett, 1956: 22, 89) – appears not to be one said in affirmation, not one that succinctly captures the desire to go on, but, rather, of the fact that one strives because that is what one *does*, what one *is*. Thus this 'on' may be considered purely in terms of description and not necessarily in terms of affirmation, as Badiou holds it to be (Badiou, 2003: 44).

Finally Mr. Shower, or Cooker may be understood as the tirelessly striving subject of willing by the way he forever drags his long-suffering 'wife' 'up and down this fornicating wilderness' (Beckett, 1961: 19-20), and whilst doing so demands that she explains the meaning of things encountered along the way.

As a brief but important aside, I shall take this opportunity to discuss a key feature of the will's striving, namely the pain that one experiences should one cease to strive for any length of time. Schopenhauer describes this kind of pain as 'boredom'. It is important that I provide an outline of Schopenhauer's conception of 'boredom', as in the later chapters on Beckettian asceticism (Chapters 8 and 9) I argue that Beckett's utilization of Schopenhauerian boredom is a key aspect of his unique ascetic method. To understand Beckett's development of Schopenhauerian boredom, it will be necessary, then, to provide an outline of Schopenhauer's understanding of boredom as a 'feeling' which compels the intellect to provide motives, or representations.

Boredom

As we have seen, for Schopenhauer, human beings are trapped in a cycle of striving. A key factor in this cycle is the feeling of 'boredom'. The feeling of boredom ensures that the intellect continues to present the will with motives for action. The cycle of striving has a number of facets. First, there is the urge to strive brought about by the essential nature of the will. This urge is experienced as a feeling of 'lacking something':

> For all striving springs from want or deficiency, from dissatisfaction with one's own state or condition, and is therefore suffering so long as it is not satisfied (WWR 1: 309).

In an attempt to alleviate this feeling of 'lack', the human intellect presents an array of motives from which the will chooses if it is so inclined. Following the presentation of a satisfactory object, or 'motive', the will then pursues the object. Finally, there is the matter of attainment, which the human being experiences as a feeling of 'happiness', or frustration, which the human being experiences as 'suffering' (WWR 1: 309). But what, then, happens if the subject attains their goal, and what is the mechanism that ensures the subject will strive again? Given that the nature of the will is to constantly strive, not to do so itself causes pain (WWR 1: 364). It is through the feeling of boredom that the intellect is prevented from experiencing a lasting sense of satisfaction. Thus we suffer because we strive, and we also suffer if we do not strive.

What, then, is the nature of boredom? Schopenhauer describes boredom as a 'fearful emptiness' (WWR 1: 312), it is a state of real distress, suffering comparable to any other serious pain (WWR 1: 313). Boredom is the feeling of the full force of willing, without the intellect being able to defer it onto a particular thing (WWR 1: 364).

Essentially, then, when in the state of boredom, the will persists with its imperatives, but the intellect is unable to effectively direct these compulsions towards a satisfactory object.

From this brief introduction to the subject of Schopenhauerian boredom, one appreciates that Schopenhauer understands boredom in a mechanistic sense: boredom ensures that the intellect continues to provide motives to the will until the will is presented with a satisfactory object. I later argue that the Beckettian tragic intellect 'uses' the effects of unalleviated boredom as a means of breaking the will. In short, Beckett employs the key, painful, features of boredom in his ascetic method. Unlike Schopenhauer, Beckett is alive to the destructive *potential* of boredom and thus seeks to deliberately generate suffering by refusing to present the will with an actionable motive.

Having foreshadowed Beckett's utilization and development of Schopenhauerian boredom, I now turn to another feature of the will's essential nature, and thus the essential nature of the willing subject, namely the *way* the will strives, i.e., in a 'blind' manner.

Blindness

Loss of sight is a particularly important metaphor in Beckettian theatre of asceticism. Pozzo, who wears glasses in Act I of *Waiting for Godot* (Beckett, 1956: 23), has entirely lost his sight by Act II; Hamm is blind from the beginning of *Endgame*, as Nagg's eyesight is poor (Beckett, 1958: 18); in *Happy Days* Winnie's sight is beginning to fail: 'Blind next,' she says in ACT I (Beckett, 1961: 2). I believe that this important motif in Beckett's theatre becomes clearer if one considers it in relation to Schopenhauer's description of the will, as 'blind will' (WWR 1: 148-9).

'Blindness' in Schopenhauerian philosophy, as we have seen, is the state in which the will exists prior to the knowledge that is supplied by the animal intellect (WWR 1: 180). The will is pure energy waiting for a means to discharge itself (Atwell, 1990: 150). In itself it is without consciousness (WWR 2: 277). With the addition of intellect, the will gains knowledge in the form of causally connected representations situated in space and time. These representations provide the will with motivation, that is, the provision of motives by the intellect provides the will with the direction it otherwise lacks. 'Motives' in Schopenhauerian thought will be discussed in the next chapter on the 'knowing subject', for it is the role of the knowing subject to provide motives in the form of objects or 'representations' to the willing subject, which in turn permits the will to act.

What is key here is the metaphor of blindness. As we have seen, Schopenhauer describes the will as 'blind' prior to the development of the animal intellect. Blindness, then, in Schopenhauerian thought exists only in the will prior to consciousness. After resignation, the will is not blind, it is 'broken' (WWR 1: 392), that is, the will no longer strives *per se.* When the broken will resigns from life, Schopenhauer claims that there is 'nothing' (WWR 1: 412). What Schopenhauer means by this is that with the extinguishing of the will, the world of representation is also extinguished, for the intellect, as servant of the will, only exists as long as the will persists. With 'No will' there is 'no representation', and in turn there is 'no world' (WWR 1: 411). There is nothing. Beckett, on the other hand, appears to use the motif of blindness as a means of illustrating the extent to which the will has been affected by the intellect's ascetic practice, namely the refusal to provide the individual will with a clear motive for action. The effective deprivation of a motive – a representation in space and time – returns the will to a state of blindness.

In Beckett's middle-period tragedies, the relative effectiveness of the intellect's asceticism is revealed by the extent to which the willing subject's sight has failed. In Beckett's tragedies, the more 'visually impaired' a willing subject becomes, the closer the knowing subject is to having placed the willing subject in a position of suffering from which it freely chooses to resign from life (WWR 1: 285, 395).

Again, this particular motif is discussed in more detail in the later chapters that deal specifically with the subject of Beckettian asceticism.

The next aspect of Schopenhauerian ontology which seems to have had some bearing on both the generation and representation of the Beckettian willing subject is Schopenhauer's argument that a person's 'character' is a manifestation of the will-to-life.

Character

Whilst each human being is essentially the will, which, as we have seen, strives blindly to preserve and to generate life, each human being is also so highly individuated that he or she expresses a distinct 'character' (WWR 1: 124), or 'individual will'. Character may be understood as the way one invariably responds to circumstance. Character in a person is the same as 'trait' in a so-called 'lower' species, or 'cause' in inorganic phenomena: it is both what I am, and the way I invariably respond to a given situation (WWR 1: 300-1; Janaway, 1989: 240; Zöller, 1999: 28-9).

One's character, then, is an essential aspect of all action. Whilst a 'motive', in the form of a representation of events occurring in the world, is a necessary precursor for an action to occur, a motive can only call forward a person's character if that character is so inclined:

> Only on the presupposition of my empirical character is the motive a sufficient ground of explanation of my conduct (WWR 1: 106).

This, I believe, may be understood in simple terms as Character + Motive = Action.

Schopenhauer believes that each person has his or her own character, thus his or her own individual will. Indeed, the higher the grade of the will's objectivity, the greater the individuality, and the greater the difference of character. Conversely, far fewer traces of individual character will be found at the lower grades of the will's objectification (WWR 1: 131). Whereas individuals of a 'lesser' species will respond in the same way to the same stimuli, each individual human being responds differently to the same motive. This is because any action of the individual is always ultimately determined by the constitution and nature of a person's individual character (WWR 1: 106; see also PP 2: 231).

Building upon Kantian thought,[xxxv] Schopenhauer argues that a person's character can be understood in three ways: as something 'intelligible', as something that is manifested 'empirically' (WWR 1: 158), and, finally, as something one 'acquires', or fails to acquire, over time. Schopenhauer uses the term intelligible character to describe the character with which was in one is born. One's intelligible character is determined by an 'expressive' act of the will (Pothast, 2008: 31):

> ... the intelligible character of every man is to be regarded as an act of will outside time, and thus indivisible, and unalterable (WWR 1: 289; see also Atwell, 1990: 38).

According to Schopenhauer, then, I am born the thing that I am. My character is innate and unchangeable (Schopenhauer, 2005: 54). It is my intelligible character that necessarily determines the life I lead. In *Waiting for Godot,* Beckett has the Vladimir-Estragon pseudocouple endorse a comparable view:

VLADIMIR: Question of temperament.

ESTRAGON: Of character.

VLADIMIR: Nothing you can do about it.

ESTRAGON: No use struggling.

VLADIMIR: One is what one is.

ESTRAGON: No use wriggling.

VLADIMIR: The essential doesn't change (Beckett, 1956: 21).

However, one can never know one's intelligible character in its entirety:

> The person's character is the structure of his or her personality ... in the last analysis an expressive 'act' of the will as thing in itself... Since this original 'act' does not belong to the phenomenal world, the person can never know [his or her] nature in full, which means the person can never fully know her or his own character as far as it is an expression of the thing in itself (Pothast, 2008: 31; see WWR 1: 289)

The extent of my knowledge of the thing that I am is that which is observed in phenomenal action, that is, my empirical character (WWR 1: 289). My empirical character is each particular movement of my will in response to a particular motive. My acquired character (WWR 1: 303, 305) is the pieced together understanding that I gain of my intelligible character by observing, and acknowledging how I respond to particular motives each time they present themselves to me (Atwell, 1995: 122):

> We obtain this only in life, through contact with the world, and it is this we speak of when anyone is praised as a person who has character, or censured as one without character... although man is always the same, he does not always understand himself, but often fails to recognize himself until he has acquired some degree of real self-knowledge (WWR 1: 303).

One often operates under the assumption of what one is, until one observes and acknowledges how one actually behaves over a period of time:

> WINNIE: Then ... now... what difficulties here, for the mind. [*Pause.*] To have been always what I am – and so changed from what I was. I am the one, I say the one, then the other. [*Pause.*] Now the one, then the other (Beckett, 1961: 24).

Defining one's acquired character, Schopenhauer states that:

> ... the acquired character ... is nothing but the most complete possible knowledge of our own individuality. It is the abstract, and consequently distinct, knowledge of the unalterable qualities of our own empirical character, and of the measure and direction of our mental and bodily powers, and so of the whole strength and weakness of our own individuality. [In this way] we know our will in general... (WWR 1: 305)

Thus a person can never know him or herself as a whole, and has no freedom to change what is an objectification of the only thing that is free, namely the thing-in-itself, however a person can come to understand their intelligible character in a more comprehensive manner by taking note of the empirical manifestations of their intelligible character, that is, how one invariably responds to particular events over the course of time (Atwell, 1990: 125; Atwell, 1995: 122). In basic terms, one cannot change what one is, but one can better understand what one is. This awareness of what one essentially is can, depending upon what one discovers, be a pleasurable or painful experience:

> Knowledge of one's character can generate either satisfaction or dissatisfaction overall, but in the main we shall be pleased to recognize some of our traits, and possibly horrified to recognize others. In Schopenhauer's view, this recognition or knowledge comes to us in virtue of conscience, and he maintains that recognition of morally bad traits cannot fail to be painfully and terribly distressing: ... "the wicked man by vehemence of his willing, suffers constant consuming, inner torment" (Atwell 1990: 137 citing WWR 1: 389).

Beckett appears to draw upon this Schopenhauerian understanding of acquired character in the tragedies of his middle period: knowledge of one's true self, one's intelligible character, as revealed by empirical character, is used by the Beckettian tragic intellect to cause the Beckettian 'will not to suffer' (Beckett, 1999: 43) to suffer. Beckett's intellectual characters – here I speak of Estragon, Lucky, Clov, Nell, Willie, and Mrs. Shower, or Cooker – reveal the will's intelligible character by recounting unfavourable instances of manifested empirical character. In Beckettian asceticism, then, acquired character is revealed as something that is potentially destructive to the will's desire to continue striving.

Read in the light of Schopenhauer's understanding of character, Beckett's unique ascetic method may be understood in the following terms. The Beckettian intellect reveals to the individual will its intelligible character by ensuring that incidents of empirical character previously deemed by the will to be unfavourable to the will's self-image (Beckett, 1999: 18-19; WWR 2: 208), and therefore not previously brought before the will because of the pain they would cause, are made known to the will. In this way the individual will acquires character, which as we have seen, may be understood as self-knowledge (WWR 1: 303). In short, Beckett uses self-knowledge – painful 'involuntary' memories (Beckett, 1999: 72-3) – to break the will:

CLOV: (*harshly.*) When old Mother Pegg asked you for oil for her lamp and you told her to get out to hell, you knew what was happening then, no? (*Pause.*) You know what she died of, Mother Pegg? Of darkness.

HAMM: (*feebly.*) I hadn't any.

CLOV: (*as before.*) Yes, you had.

Shortly after becoming cognisant of this devastating knowledge regarding his true nature, Hamm resigns from life:

HAMM: It's the end, Clov, we've come to the end. I don't need you any more (Beckett, 1958: 48, 50).

These claims are further substantiated in the later chapters on Beckettian asceticism, where I argue that the Beckettian intellect reveals the individual will's intelligible character by recounting incidents which challenge self-understanding. Again, these incidents are delivered in the form of involuntary memories.

However, I now conclude this elucidation of the Schopenhauerian subject of willing as a concept that may shed some additional light on a number of Beckett's tragic characters with a discussion of Schopenhauer's understanding of 'free will'.

Free Will

Only the will is free (WWR 1: 272). What does Schopenhauer mean by this? For Schopenhauer, freedom is a matter of 'determination', of 'affirmation' and of 'resignation' (WWR 2: 629).

The will is free because it is a self-causing entity (Young, 2005: 79). As a self-causing entity the will is not determined by reason or ground (WWR 1: 287). The will's freedom stems from the absence of causation. This overall freedom means that when the will manifests, or objectifies, itself in the phenomenal realm it does so freely. In other words, the will's actions are free. We saw in the previous section on 'character' that a person's character is determined by an event that occurs outside time, and therefore is not subject to *alteration* by events occurring in time (WWR 1: 286, 287). It is because of this that the objectified phenomena of the will, such as human beings, are not free. Each action of the will's phenomena is necessarily determined by the will's free willing (WWR 1: 288).

As well as the 'freedom' to bring phenomena into existence – in other words, to objectify itself – the will can also express its freedom through its phenomena in one other way: the will can resign within particular phenomena. Only the will can freely resign from life (WWR 1: 285, 288, 301). That, according to Schopenhauer, is the only way the will expresses its freedom in the phenomenal realm: the will ceases to will (WWR 1: 404). Human beings are the only phenomena of the will in which resignation of the will can occur (WWR 1: 288). Only in the highest grade of the will's objectification (WWR 1: 253) can the will acquire knowledge of its true nature, namely that all is one, undifferentiated entity, and that suffering is therefore unavoidable. It is the human capacity to perceive in a will-free manner, i.e., to present knowledge of the underlying basis of existence in the form of Platonic Ideas, that then allows the will to understand itself as 'one'. The will cannot be abolished, or quietened, by anything other than knowledge of its inner nature (WWR 1: 400, 403).

Given that only the will is free, the intellect can at best promote the will's resignation by presenting it with knowledge that is a disincentive for action. The ultimate act of resignation, however, is not something the intellect can cause. The most the intellect can do is to place the will in a position from which it freely chooses to resign from life (WWR 1: 285, 395). In short the intellect can promote the will's self-understanding, but cannot make it resign as a consequence of such knowledge.

It is something comparable to this conception of free will that we observe in Beckettian theatre of asceticism: release from the servitude of the will is ultimately a matter of 'grace' (WWR 1: 404; Weller, 2005: 81; Young, 2005: 193) or the will's choosing to resign. Whereas one individual will freely resigns from life when confronted with knowledge of oneness and ubiquitous suffering, another will freely chooses to continue striving (Atwell, 1995: 164-5).

Thus it is that in *Endgame* we see one willing subject, Hamm, freely resign from life when presented with knowledge of his true, intelligible, character (Beckett, 1958: 50), and in *Happy Days* we witness another willing subject, Winnie, continue to strive despite having been presented with knowledge of her own suffering (Beckett, 1961: 29). Beckett appears to argue that the will's resignation is a matter of grace. All the intellect can do is hold fast to its goal of breaking the will. As to whether the will resigns is ultimately a matter for the will alone.

Conclusion

I have argued that Schopenhauer's ontological aspect of the 'I', the subject of willing, is a productive way of approaching a number of Beckett's tragic characters.

Many of the features of the Schopenhauerian willing subject are also present in Beckett's depiction of the dominant aspect of his tragic pseudocouples. These features include the willing subject's sexual aspect, and the propensity to strive in a tireless, 'blind' fashion. In addition to this, Beckett appears to draw upon Schopenhauer's understanding of will as a person's 'character', and Schopenhauer's conception of 'free will', both in terms of the ability to enter into existence, and the ability to resign from life.

Given this ontological basis, we may understand the tactics employed by Beckett's willing subjects – Vladimir, Pozzo, Hamm, Nagg, Winnie, and Mr. Shower, or Cooker – as a manifestation of the capabilities of the Schopenhauerian willing subject. As the will's essential nature is to strive, striving is the central, indeed *only*, weapon that the will employs to compel the knowing subject to perform its role as servant of the will. Beckett depicts this propensity to strive as the urge to go 'on', and the drive to 'resume the struggle'. In addition to this, Beckett, who, unlike Schopenhauer, gives a voice to the will (O'Hara, 1981: 265, 267), also depicts the compulsion to strive in another way, namely as an endless series of demands for the habitual information that will avert suffering. By tirelessly coercing the knowing subject to provide habitual information (Beckett, 1999: 90), the willing subject attempts to avoid the 'suffering of being' (Beckett, 1999: 18-19). The intellect's attempts to refuse the willing subject's demands for the provision of information is the subject matter of the next chapter on Schopenhauerian and Beckettian epistemology.

Chapter 6: Epistemology – The Subject of Knowing

Introduction

Schopenhauer's conception of one's intellectual aspect, the knowing subject, provides a productive framework for interpreting the behaviour of a number of Beckett's middle-period tragic characters, namely Estragon, Lucky, Clov, Nell, Willie, and Mrs. Shower or Cooker. The intellect that Schopenhauer describes is the intellect that functions as a servant of the will; it is the intellect that perceives itself as one with the body within which it finds itself, and through which it experiences the world (WWR 1: 176; Schopenhauer, 1974a: 75). Though I believe there are many similarities between Schopenhauer's knowing subject and the knowing subject one finds in Beckett's middle period tragedies, the intellectual aspect of the self that one finds in these works is not the typical intellect as described by Schopenhauer – rather it is the intellect that refuses to properly perform its servile function. I believe we may understand Beckett's intellectual character as such by the way they refuse to do the very things that Schopenhauer describes as the knowing subject's normal, will-serving, functions. The intellect's normal role is to provide representations in space and time, form concepts based upon these representations, and so on. These representations serve as motives for the will. The Beckettian intellect essentially refuses to perform, or subverts, its function of providing motives to the individual will, which in turn continues to demand there presentation. In other words, whereas the Schopenhauerian formula for action may be understood as Character + Motive = Action (WWR 1: 106), Beckett's formula for ascetic practice may be understood as Character – Motive (Representation) = Inaction. To understand the way Beckett's intellectual characters refuse to provide habitual information to the willing subject, we must first understand the way they would normally act when acting as a servant of the will, and that normal way of functioning is the basis to Schopenhauerian epistemology.[xxxvi]

The Status and Role of the Knowing Subject

That which within us 'knows', or generates a picture of the world for the benefit of the willing subject, is the subject of knowing (WWR 1: 5). In contrast to the primary status of the will in the formation of the self, the subject of knowing is described variously as 'secondary' (WWR 1: 292), a 'point of unity' or 'focus' of brain activity (WWR 2: 499), a 'mere function of the brain, and ... not our real self' (WWR 2: 239), and the surface of a deep body of water (WWR 2: 216; Aquila, 1993: 245). Schopenhauer often describes the intellect as something that has occurred by 'accident' (WWR 2: 201), the result of the will-to-life's ceaseless striving (see Janaway, 1989: 257). Essentially what we understand as animal intellect is, for Schopenhauer, a result of the increased needs of particular manifestations, or objectifications of the will, (WWR 1: 150; WWR 2: 205). For essentially defenceless human beings to persist in a hostile environment more and more intelligence is required, to the point where the intellect occupies a greater part of the brain, and, finally, reason comes about (WWR 1: 151; WWR 2: 205; 278). But as this hypothesis indicates, intellect depends upon the existence of the organism, which in turn depends upon the will (WWR 2: 278). Therefore 'mind' is a 'product of the will' (Magee, 1997: 161), the will's 'will-to-know' (WWR 2: 258).

In Schopenhauer's conception of the self, then, the subject of knowing, or intellect, is a 'servant' (WWR 1: 176), or 'a mere slave and bondman of the will' (WWR 2: 212) that the will drives towards life (WWR 2: 360):

> *Enter Pozzo and Lucky. Pozzo drives Lucky by means of a rope passed around his neck, so that Lucky is first to appear... Lucky carries a heavy bag, a folding stool, a picnic basket and a greatcoat. Pozzo a whip* (Beckett, 1956: 21).

Throughout the three plays under consideration, Beckett consistently employs the motif of utility or domestication to depict the way the willing subject considers its knowing subject. Pozzo has no qualms about calling Lucky a 'hog' (Beckett, 1956: 40). Vladimir reprimands Estragon in the same way (Beckett, 1956: 69), though admittedly with less conviction. Hamm refers to Clov as his dog; something of which Clov is more than aware (Beckett, 1958: 12, 30). Indeed, Pozzo also derides Lucky's distress by suggesting that 'old dogs have more dignity' (Beckett, 1956: 32). Conjuring up the image of children approaching a violent dog, Pozzo also tells Vladimir and Estragon to be careful when approaching Lucky, as he is 'wicked... with strangers' (1956: 22). Winnie's question about the nature of a hog is as much about putting Willie in his place, as it is the desire to know a basic fact:

WINNIE: ... genuine pure... ah! hog's setae. [*Pause.*] What is a hog exactly? [*Pause. Turns slightly towards WILLIE.*] What exactly is a hog, Willie, do you know, I can't remember. [*Pause. Turning a little further, pleading.*] What is a hog, Willie, please! [*Pause.*]

WILLIE: Castrated male swine. [*Happy expression appears on WINNIE'S face.*] Reared for slaughter. [*Happy expression increases...*] (Beckett, 1961: 22).

Thus Beckett consistently depicts the relationship between the willing and knowing subject as that of user and used, master and servant, owner and owned—a fundamentally oppressive relationship regardless of how the willing subject chooses to view the union—be it as one of 'loyalty', or 'love', or 'friendship'.

vis inertiae

That the individual will must drive the intellect towards life has much to do with the fact that the intellect is by its very nature 'indolent'. Unlike the tireless will (WWR 2: 239), the intellect tires easily (WWR 2: 211). Indeed, without the insistence of the will, and its constant promptings into action, the intellect quickly comes to rest:

> ... the intellect, like everything physical, is subject to *vis inertiae* [force of inertia], and is therefore active only when it is put in motion by something else, by the will; and this will rules it, guides it, incites it to further effort, in short imparts to it the activity that is not originally inherent in it. Therefore it willingly rests as soon as it is allowed to do so, and often declares itself to be indolent and disinclined to activity (WWR 2: 213).

Because of this tendency, Beckett's willing subjects have devised a variety of ways of summoning their respective knowing subjects. Pozzo and Hamm, summon, or put their respective knowing subjects into motion, with the tug of a rope and the blowing of a whistle. Nagg, the willing subject, summons Nell, his knowing subject, by knocking on the lid of her ashcan, and Winnie rouses Willie in a number of ways, namely by spitting toothpaste at him, calling 'Hoo-oo', and prodding him with her parasol (Beckett, 1956: 23; 1958: 13, 18; 1961: 2-4).

Winnie portrays Willie's 'indolence' in terms of his having no 'zest for life':

> Poor Willie ... no zest ... for anything ... no interest ... in life ... poor dear Willie ... sleep for ever ... marvellous gift ... nothing to touch it ... in my opinion ... always said so ... wish I had it... (Beckett, 1961: 2).

Again, in Schopenhauerian terms we may productively view Willie's behaviour as revealing the *vis inertiae* so typical of the intellect prior to its being compelled to move (WWR 2: 213). Willie, as an 'indolent' knowing subject, 'disinclined to activity' (WWR 2: 213) requires constant prompting to perform his role:

WINNIE: [*She strikes down at him with beak of parasol.*] ... Don't go off on me again now dear will you, I may need you. [*Pause.*] No hurry, no hurry, just don't curl up on me again (Beckett, 1961: 4).

And later:

WINNIE: Do you know what has occurred, Willie? [*Pause.*] Have you gone off on me again? (Beckett, 1961: 16).

Beckett has Estragon enact this characteristic of *vis inertiae* by falling asleep throughout Acts I and II of *Waiting for Godot* (see Beckett, 1956: 15, 82, 88, 89). This state of sleeping is, for the most part, interrupted by Vladimir, who appears unable to tolerate existence without the 'company' of his 'friend':

ESTRAGON: Let's stop talking for a minute, do you mind?

VLADIMIR: (*feebly.*) All right. (*Estragon sits down on the mound. Vladimir paces agitatedly to and fro, halting from time to time to gaze into distance off. Estragon falls asleep. Vladimir halts before Estragon.*) Gogo! ... Gogo! ... GOGO!

Estragon wakes with a start.

ESTRAGON: (*restored to the horror of his situation.*) I was asleep! (*Despairingly.*) Why will you never let me sleep?

VLADIMIR: I felt lonely (Beckett, 1956: 15).

In this passage we see the interplay of the two subjects of the 'I' at work: whereas Vladimir as will is tireless (WWR 1: 164), Estragon's constitution ensures that he tires quickly. Only when the knowing subject is pressed into service by the willing subject does it then possess the requisite energy to function (WWR 2: 213).

True to his nature as the easily tiring knowing subject, Lucky falls asleep the moment he drops to the ground (Beckett, 1956: 23; cf. WWR 2: 213). Indeed, in a similar vein to Estragon, Lucky falls asleep 'as soon as [he] is allowed to do so' (WWR 2: 213). Not until the rope is yanked, that is, not until Pozzo presses him into service, does Lucky wake up.

The interplay between the willing and knowing subjects – where the former presses the latter into service – is portrayed throughout the three plays under consideration. Pozzo demands that his slave, Lucky, 'think' by abusively ordering him to do so – 'Think, pig! ... Think ... Think ' (Beckett, 1956: 42). Similarly, Estragon is ordered by his willing subject, Vladimir, to 'return the ball', that is resolve Vladimir's uncertainty (Beckett, 1956: 12):

VLADIMIR: Do you not recognise the place?

ESTRAGON: Recognize! What is there to recognize? All my lousy life I've crawled about in the mud! And you talk to me about scenery! (*Looking wildly about him.*) Look at this muckheap! I've never stirred from it! (Beckett, 1956: 61).

VLADIMIR: You don't remember any fact, any circumstance?

ESTRAGON: (*weary.*) Don't torment me, Didi (Beckett, 1956: 66).

In typical Schopenhauerian fashion, Estragon as knowing subject is 'indolent and disinclined to activity' (WWR 2: 213), sarcastically declaring, when prompted, that he finds Vladimir's concerns 'most extraordinarily interesting' (Beckett, 1956: 13). In *Endgame*, Hamm orders Clov to have 'a bright idea':

HAMM: ... Think of something.

CLOV: What?

HAMM: An idea, have an idea. (*Angrily*). A bright idea!

CLOV: ... Ah!

HAMM: What a brain! (Beckett, 1958: 33).

In *Happy Days*, Winnie bombards Willie with a number of incessant questions, as, similarly, Mrs. Shower or Cooker is continually asked to discover the meaning of things, and to explain the world to Mr. Shower or Cooker (Beckett, 1961: 9, 22, 19-20). In each case we witness the depiction of internal cause and effect in the form of the individual will's prompting, and the knowing subject's response.

In turn, as the knowing subject ceases to act as soon as the will ceases to drive it forward (WWR 2: 213), the willing subject requires a motive to provide it with guidance (WWR 2: 208). In Schopenhauerian terms, each of the subjects of

knowing and willing needs the other to move—the former requires the latter to move at all, the latter requires the former to move in a particular way.

Whilst the will may insist that we strive, the intellect determines the course of that movement in the form of the motives it presents. That the willing subject, Pozzo, for example, requires a motive to proceed, and presently lacks 'motivation' is captured in a number of ways. First, when deciding to remain in Vladimir and Estragon's company a little longer, Pozzo is faced with the problem of how he is to return to a seated position:

POZZO: But how am I to sit down now, without affectation, now that I have risen? Without appearing to – how shall I say – falter. (*To Vladimir.*) I beg your pardon? (*Silence.*) Perhaps you didn't speak (Beckett, 1956: 28)

And later:

POZZO: I'd like very much to sit down, but I don't quite know how to go about it.

ESTRAGON: Could I be of any help?

POZZO: If you asked me perhaps.

ESTRAGON: What?

POZZO: If you asked me to sit down.

ESTRAGON: Would that be a help?

POZZO: I fancy so.

ESTRAGON: Here we go. Be seated, sir, I beg of you.

POZZO: No, no, I wouldn't think of it! (*Pause. Aside.*) Ask me again.

ESTRAGON: Come, come take a seat, I beseech you, you'll get pneumonia.

POZZO: You really think so?

ESTRAGON: Why it's absolutely certain.

POZZO: No doubt you are right. (*He sits down.*) Done it again! (*Pause.*) Thank you, dear fellow (Beckett, 1956: 36).

In the first passage, Pozzo resorts to inventing a motive by imagining that someone has spoken to him, in the second passage Estragon provides the motive, that is, Estragon acts as a surrogate for the recalcitrant Lucky. We thus witness the process of character + motive = action. We may note that in a similar vein, Pozzo has great difficulty leaving in ACT I (Beckett, 1956: 47), and, after having fallen in ACT II, cannot get up without assistance (Beckett, 1956: 77-84).

As one of *Happy Days* knowing subjects, Willie, must be prompted into action, for as the knowing subject he inherently lacks 'will'. Winnie, in turn, requires a 'motive' to proceed, for as willing subject she lacks motivation. This is a key Schopenhauerian thought:

> ... the will in itself is without knowledge, but the understanding associated with it is without will. Therefore the will behaves like a body that is moved, the understanding like the causes that set it in motion, for it is the medium of the motives (WWR 2: 208).

This relationship is never more clearly revealed than in the scene where Winnie raises her parasol above her head, and then, though no longer wishing to hold it aloft, is unable to put it down:

> WINNIE: Reason says Put it down, Winnie, it is not helping you, put the thing down and get on with something else. [*Pause.*] I cannot. I cannot move. [*Pause.*] No, something must happen in the world, take place, some change, I cannot, if I am to move again. [*Pause.*] Willie. [*Mildly.*] Help. [*Pause.*] No? Bid me put this thing down, Willie, I would obey you instantly, as I have always done, honoured and obeyed. [*Pause.*] Please Willie. [*Mildly.*] For pity's sake (Beckett, 1961: 16).

In each of these examples we see that whilst the individual will is the primary aspect of the self, it is beholden to the intellect to guide it by providing it with a motive towards which it may expend its energy. Without a motive, the individual will is unable to move. It is this understanding of cause and effect that Beckett appears to build upon when developing his ascetic method of Character – Motive (Representation) = Inaction. The previous examples illustrate the physical frustration that ensues when the will is unable to act.

Role of the Knowing Subject

What, then, is the role of the intellect according to Schopenhauer? What functions does the intellect typically perform when acting as a servant of the will? In contrast

to the will, which strives without an ultimate purpose, the knowing subject is the aspect of human beings that orders the world, that categorizes the chaos:

> CLOV: I love order. It's my dream. A world where all would be silent and still and each thing in its last place, under the last dust (Beckett, 1958: 39).

Unlike the blind, arational will, the knowing subject's role is to 'classify' and 'relate' the representations it generates 'in such a way as to attain objective knowledge' (Janaway, 1989: 264). In this sense the subject of knowing is the 'cold and indifferent spectator' (WWR 2: 277-8) of the world it represents. Without the knowing subject there are no objects in the world. Objects, representations, require a knowing subject, for in Schopenhauerian epistemology, there is no object without a subject because to say 'object' is to say 'representation', and all representations are creations of the knowing subject (WWR 1: 13-14; Atwell, 1995: 11). Metaphorically, the subject of knowing may be understood as a set of eyes for the will that is otherwise blind:

> The will, which hitherto followed its tendency in the dark with extreme certainty and infallibility, has at this stage kindled a light for itself (WWR 1: 150):

This 'light' provided by the intellect is the 'world as representation'. Schopenhauer describes the world of representation as the 'self-knowledge of the will' (WWR 1: 151; 165; 274):

> POZZO: Guess who taught me all these beautiful things. (*Pause. Pointing to Lucky.*) My Lucky! ... But for him, all my thoughts, all my feelings would have been of common

> things... Beauty, grace, truth of the first water, I knew they were all beyond me. So I took a knook (Beckett, 1956: 33).

In saying this, Pozzo essentially reiterates a claim that Schopenhauer makes about the will: that in itself the will is without consciousness (WWR 2: 201), that is, the will is 'blind'. Only by acquiring intellect as a servant – or 'taking a knook' in Beckettian terms – does the will gain an understanding of the world, and thus of itself. In Pozzo's act of taking a slave to reveal the world we therefore see a parallel to Schopenhauer's will 'kindling a light for itself' in the form of the world as representation. Pozzo's 'knowledge' is the sum total of what Lucky has revealed to him. The will knows what it knows about itself, then, because of the material presented to it by the knowing subject (WWR 2: 277; WWR 1: 410):

> ... the will-intellect union knows, in virtue of the intellect component, what it as will wills, that is, what its nature is only by knowing the world of appearance (Atwell, 1995: 28).

When acting as a servant of the will, that is, when affirming the will, the intellect presents the world as an unending series of particularities, and, as a consequence of this, the will also perceives, or misperceives, itself as an individual amongst innumerable individuals. Perceiving the word in this way, the will understands the world in relation to its own needs (WWR 1: 176; Atwell, 1995: 154). Broadly understood, the essential role of the intellect is to provide the willing subject with representations of the world, which permit the willing subject to act in a manner that promotes the survival of the species. These representations act as 'motives' for the will to act upon (WWR 2: 206, 286). As we recall, there are two necessary factors for an action to occur: character (the individual, human, will), and a motive (in the form of a representation). Providing the second aspect of this formula for action, the intellect 'lays before the will all kinds of things, and in accordance with

these the will selects what is in conformity with its true nature...' (WWR 2: 223; see also WWR 2: 358).

It is to the end of survival that the will has generated the will-to-know (WWR 2: 258). It is also for the purpose of survival that the will, as the dominant, primary, aspect of the self, also possesses the will-not-to-know (WWR 2: 208). Indeed the primary status of the will is revealed by the will's ability to preclude the intellect from presenting harmful representations, as much as it is revealed by the will's ability to have the intellect generate actionable representations:

> Our interest in preserving a tolerable view of ourselves often intervenes to prevent our thinking the truth (Janaway, 1989: 260).

In the interests of self-preservation, the intellect must often subvert its own function, which is to provide an accurate representation of the world, so that the will may not suffer the pain of that accuracy (Janaway, 1989: 263-4). Given this, the will often 'prohibits the intellect from having certain representations' that it knows from previous occasions will cause it distress (WWR 2: 208; and see Gardner, 1999: 377).

This normal functioning of the will-intellect relationship is perhaps best captured by the interaction of the pseudocouple of Vladimir and Estragon. Vladimir's primary status is revealed by his ability to both refuse information that he believes may prove harmful, and, conversely, to demand certain information that allows him to avoid suffering.

Each time Vladimir awakens Estragon, Estragon endeavours to share with Vladimir the substance of his 'nightmares'. Vladimir's response to this proposal is enlightening:

ESTRAGON: I had a dream.

VLADIMIR: Don't tell me!

ESTRAGON: I dreamt that—

VLADIMIR: DON'T TELL ME!

ESTRAGON: (*gesture towards the universe.*) This one is enough for you, is it? (*Silence.*) It's not nice of you, Didi. Who am I to tell my private nightmares to if I can't tell them to you?

VLADIMIR: Let them remain private. You know I can't bear that (Beckett, 1956: 15-16; see also 70, 89).

In addition to the suppression of painful thoughts, the subversion of the intellect's main function may also involve the production of positive representations. Near the beginning of ACT II, for example, Vladimir has Estragon repeat a number of platitudes seemingly for his own benefit:

VLADIMIR: You must be happy too, deep down, if you only knew it.

ESTRAGON: Happy about what?

VLADIMIR: To be back with me again.

ESTRAGON: Would you say so?

VLADIMIR: Say you are happy, even if it's not true.

ESTRAGON: What am I to say?

VLADIMIR: Say, I am happy.

ESTRAGON: I am happy.

VLADIMIR: So am I.

ESTRAGON: So am I.

VLADIMIR: We are happy.

ESTRAGON: We are happy (Beckett, 1956: 60).

Here the will wants the intellect to profess a version of the world that it knows not to be true, so that the will may not know, or forget, how unhappy it is. This ability to falsify one's understanding of the world proves to Beckett and to Schopenhauer that, far from the truth, providing an acceptable version of itself is often the most important thing for the will not to suffer, and for the will to life:

> ... the will, when its servant the *intellect*, is unable to produce the thing desired, compels this servant at any rate to picture this thing to it, and generally to undertake the role of comforter, to pacify its lord and master, as a nurse does a child... Here the intellect is bound to do violence to its own nature, which is aimed at truth, since it is compelled, contrary to its own laws, to regard as true things that are neither true nor probable and often scarcely possible, merely in order to pacify, soothe, and send to sleep for a while the restless and unmanageable will. We clearly see here who is master and who is servant (WWR 2: 216-217).

It is because of this capacity of the will, namely to preclude painful knowledge, that the intellect must devise an ascetic method that allows for the presentation of material the will has already deemed harmful. The Beckettian ascetic method, where the intellect appears to perform its role of servant of the will but in effect provides representations that lack actionable material, is the Beckettian ascetic's means of circumventing the will's will-not-to-know. The Beckettian ascetic method

of depriving the will of habitual consciousness ultimately permits the intellect's presentation of harmful knowledge in the form of an involuntary memory.

Having provided a broad outline of the role of the Schopenhauerian knowing subject, and the way that Beckett appears to engage with this material, I shall now discuss the specific way that the intellect typically functions, and the material that is generated by an intellect when it acts as a servant of the will. To this end, one needs to look primarily to the First Book of Schopenhauer's main work, and to his doctoral dissertation, *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason.*[xxxvii]

The Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason

In the *Fourfold Root* Schopenhauer explains that there are four kinds of objects in the world because the subject has the capacity to project four kinds of objects as representations (WWR 1: 7, 11). These objects divide into four distinct classes: empirical or 'real' objects; concepts; space and time; and, finally human will. Importantly, the *Fourfold Root* describes the 'normal' way in which the intellect functions when it acts as a servant of the will, that is, when it provides representations of individual things as motives for action. We may understand Beckett's knowing subjects *as* knowing subjects by their refusal to perform the very functions for which they were generated, and which the willing subject has come to expect them to perform.

Empirical objects

The first class of object described in the *Fourfold Root* is that of empirical objects. Empirical objects begin as raw data received by the senses, which the intellect's faculty of understanding converts into objects that exist in space and time (Schopenhauer, 1974a: 75; WWR 1: 11-12). Unlike Kantian epistemology, in Schopenhauerian thought there is no role for the faculty of reason in perception.[xxxviii] Though Schopenhauer divides the intellect into the two faculties of 'understanding' and 'reason', only the understanding is at work in the generation of empirical objects (Young, 2005: 37-9). White describes the process in the following way:

> Sensibility plays an important part in the creation of real objects by imposing time and space upon the data given to the intellect, but it is the faculty of understanding that plays the leading role, both 'summoning space' to its aid and imposing its own form of causality upon the data. What happens is that sensory data are presented to the intellect and 'conceived of' by the understanding as effects; or, to put the point another way, the understanding infers that objects cause the data. Since inner sensibility imposes its form of time upon the data, and since outer sensibility at the bidding of the understanding imposes its form of space, the outcome is an inferred, spatiotemporal, and causally active object (White, 1999: 71-72; see also Janaway, 1989: 157-8)).

In other words, with the aid of space and time, the understanding alone attributes a cause to an effect (WWR 1: 11-12, 19):

> In sum, then, for both us and the non-human animals, the entire rich fabric of the world of objects is constructed for us by the

understanding, entirely without the aid of concepts (Young, 2005: 39).[xxxix]

We may understand a number of Beckett's characters as knowing subjects by the way they refuse to perform the normal intellectual function of generating empirical objects. In the tragedies that comprise Beckett's theatre of asceticism, the willing subject of each pseudocouple expects his or her respective knowing subject to perform this essential function. This, I believe, is particularly evident in the play *Endgame*. In *Endgame*, for example, we see a number of exchanges between the willing subject, Hamm, and the knowing subject, Clov, where the former demands empirical knowledge, and the latter refuses to provide clear, that is, actionable, empirical information:

HAMM: Go and get two bicycle-wheels.

CLOV: There are no more bicycle wheels.

NAGG: Me pap!

HAMM: Give him his pap.

CLOV: There's no more pap.

HAMM: Nature has forgotten us.

CLOV: There's no more nature.

HAMM: If I could drag myself down to the sea! I'd make a pillow of sand for my head and the tide would come.

CLOV: There's no more tide.

HAMM: Give me a rug, I'm freezing.

CLOV: There are no more rugs (Beckett, 1958: 15, 16, 41, 44).

It is through his refusal to provide his willing subject, Hamm, with actionable motives in the form of empirical objects, that we may understand Clov as an example of a Beckettian ascetic intellect, or a knowing subject that is attempting to break its individual will.

Concepts

The second class of objects in the *Fourfold Root* is that of 'concepts', or, as Schopenhauer refers to them, 'representations of representations' (WWR 1: 40), as for a concept to have any currency it must be built upon intuited knowledge, that is, the kind of knowledge gained in the first class of objects (WWR 1: 21). A concept is a representation that has been fixed in the mind, and can be drawn upon at a later time, that is, when the actual thing perceived is no longer there. It is the faculty of reason that fixes intuitions of the understanding into concepts, and this it does for the purpose of explanation (WWR 1: 21-22). The process of combining concepts, then, forms a 'judgement', or 'thought' (Young, 2005: 40). A 'true' judgement is one that follows the rules of logic (Schopenhauer 1974a: 154-156).

Schopenhauer is generally dismissive of the human capacity to reason, describing reason as 'an empty poor thing' (Schopenhauer, 1974a: 147) and 'suitably called "reflection" since that is all it is, a pallid reflection of perception' (WWR 1: 62). He limits the role of the faculty of reason to that of repeating existing representations, and having no role to play in the formation of representations. There are several reasons for this diminution of the importance of reason in perception.

There are, of course, Schopenhauer's well-documented concerns with thinkers such as Hegel, Schelling, and Fichte, whom Schopenhauer believed dealt with ideas that had no basis in intuited reality, that is, they worked with concepts that could not be traced to what they had perceived or experienced, and were, therefore, groundless (see, for example, WWR 1: 26). Schopenhauer is also attempting to emphasise the primary status of the will in the formation of the organism. In philosophy, prior to Schopenhauer, the human capacity for reason was held to differentiate human beings from the rest of nature. The devaluation of reason in perception is an attempt on Schopenhauer's part to return human beings to nature by re-emphasising our essence as primarily 'willing', and not 'knowing' organisms (see, for example, WWR 2: 216-217).

However, Schopenhauer's main concern about the human capacity to reason is that it ultimately undermines our intuitive grasp of the Platonic Idea, and thus the possibility of our seeing through the principle of individuation. One of the key features of reason is deliberation, which Schopenhauer believes, 'begets irresolution and uncertainty' and 'in many cases' reason 'obstructs the adequate objectification of the will through action' (WWR 1: 151-2). Essentially, the human capacity to reason gets in the way of the human capacity to perceive the Idea:

> Reason is necessary . . . where rapid decisions, bold action, quick and firm comprehension are needed, but if it gains the upper hand, if it confuses and hinders the intuitive, immediate discovery of what is right by the pure understanding, and at the same time prevents this from being grasped, and if it produces irresolution, then it can easily ruin everything (WWR 1: 57-8).

As a mere tool of the will, then, reason, cannot free a person from subjectivity (WWR 1: 301; Zöller, 1995: 8-9). For Schopenhauer, reason cannot be a means to allow the will to know its true nature because the products of reason, namely 'concepts' are one of the fourfold root, and therefore one of the ways that the

intellect acts in a will-full manner. Through reason the will still only knows representation, and individuation (WWR 1: 185-6; and 190). Whilst reason permits a 'conflict of motives', that is, the ability to deliberate WWR 2: 205), and to weigh up a number of options, the strongest motive – the one to which the will by its nature is drawn – still determines the will by necessity (WWR 1: 297). In this way, a person is still subject to the control of motives (WWR 1: 301). Reason, therefore, just like intuited knowledge, is a means of permitting the will to act. Though in the case of reason, action occurs after pause for thought, or an 'elective decision' (WWR 1: 301).

All in all, Schopenhauer believes that the human capacity to reason has made life worse:

> With abstract knowledge, with the faculty of reason, doubt and error have appeared in the theoretical, care and remorse in the practical (WWR 1: 35).

Reason enhances one's ability to suffer, as the ability to reflect on the past, and to project into the future magnifies the suffering one feels in the present (WWR 1: 98). Schopenhauer's criticism of reason – the way it promotes irresolution, and the way it provides for additional suffering – appears to be the very thing that Beckett utilizes in his ascetic practice. Indeed, I believe we may know a number of Beckett's tragic characters as subjects of knowing, then, by the way they use the capacity to reason not to furnish the individual will with judgements, but rather to cause irresolution.

In *Waiting for Godot*, we witness the knowing subject, Lucky, attempt to deny his willing subject, Pozzo, a judgement. In each case, Lucky presents a concept or thought which is either unfinished or lost, and by doing so precludes the addition of a further concept that then permits a judgment to be formed. This in turn

prevents the will from acting, as the individual will (character) cannot act without a motive. As an example of this ascetic method I here provide an excerpt from Lucky's 'tirade' that occurs in Act I:

> LUCKY: Given the existence as uttered forth in the public works of Puncher and Wattmann of a personal God ... who ... loves us dearly with some exceptions for reasons unknown ... but not so fast and considering what is more that as a result of the labours left unfinished crowned by the Acacacacademy of Anthropopopometry of Essy-in-Possy of Testew and Cunard it is established beyond all doubt all other doubt than that which clings to the labours of men that as a result of the labours left unfinished of Testew and Cunard it is established as hereinafter but not so fast for reasons unknown that as a result of the public works of Puncher and Wattmann it is established beyond all doubt that in view of the labours of Fartov and Belcher left unfinished for reasons unknown of Tetstew and Cunard left unfinished ... and considering what is more much more grave that in the light of the labours lost of Steinweg and Peterman it appears what is much more grave that in the light the light the light of the labours lost of Steinweg and Peterman ... (Beckett, 1956: 42-45).

The capacity to reason allows human beings to hold the will at bay (WWR 1: 202; WWR 2: 205), because the capacity to reason allows human beings to think 'ephectically', that is, to suspend judgement, to delay, and to prevaricate.[xl] Beckettian asceticism is a destructive utilization of this capacity. Beckett's intellectual aspects provide the impression of reasoned thought – by providing a

number of options – but essentially deny the will an elective choice by never bringing the process of providing concepts to an end:

> LUCKY: On the other hand ... but not so fast... but not so fast... (Beckett, 1956: 42-5).

Space and Time

The third class of objects in the fourfold root is time and space. Time and space are the *a priori* forms of inner and outer sensibility respectively (Schopenhauer, 1974a: 77, 193), which are brought to bear upon the raw sensory data received by the body in the process of the understanding's production of empirical objects (Janaway, 1989: 39). As well as providing objects with place and succession, 'time and space are themselves perceived, [and thus constitute] the objects of pure, a priori, and immediate perception' (White, 1999: 80 in reference to Schopenhauer, 1974a: 193). It is because of time and space that plurality has become possible or conceivable (WWR 1: 127); for time and space divide what is originally undivided by representing the will as a 'plurality of coexistent and successive things' (WWR 1: 112-113). For this reason, Schopenhauer describes time and space as the *principium individuationis*, or the *principle of individuation*. One of the intrinsic characteristics of the intellect, then, is to represent the world as fractured into successive moments and particular places, and thus to present this fractured version of the world as motivation for the will to act upon. Thus if the intellect provides the will with representations of individual things, then that, fractured knowledge, is the knowledge of the world that the will possesses. Based upon such information, the willing subject perceives itself as an individual among individuals (WWR 1: 373), and acts in a manner appropriate to such knowledge: that is, egoistically.

We may understand a number of Beckett's tragic characters as subjects of knowing by the way they refuse to provide their individual will with knowledge situated in time and space, or about time and space.

In *Endgame*, the knowing subject, Clov, responds to each one of Hamm's demands to structure the world, or situate events in the world, by offering a series of imprecise responses:

HAMM: ... What time is it?

CLOV: The same as usual.

HAMM: Is it light?

CLOV: It isn't dark (Beckett, 1958: 13, 42).

In Act II of the play, *Happy Days*, the knowing subject, Willie, takes a vow of silence, or, in other words, ceases to furnish the will with representations of the world. Having closed off all communication to his individual will, the willing subject, Winnie, has lost her sense of time. As we saw in an earlier discussion, time is one of the *a prior* functions of the intellect. Beckett represents the intellect's recalcitrance by revealing the fact that without the intellect the will has no understanding of time:

WINNIE: Willie. [*Pause. Louder.*] Willie. [*Pause. Eyes front.*] May one still speak of time? [*Pause.*] Say it is a long time now, Willie, since I saw you ... ... The bag is there, Willie, as good as ever, the one you gave me that day ... to go to market. [*Pause. Eyes front.*] That day. [*Pause.*] What day? (Beckett, 1961: 23-4).

In *Waiting for Godot*, we observe Pozzo's struggle to comprehend time itself without the aid of his intellect:

> POZZO: Yes, the road seems long when one journeys all alone for ... (*he consults his watch*) ... yes ... (*he calculates*) ... yes, six hours, that's right, six hours on end ... (Beckett, 1956: 24)

Though Pozzo's calculations are rendered somewhat questionable, when he later refers to his watch to ascertain the length of time that has past since taking on Lucky as a slave:

> POZZO: That was nearly sixty years ago ... (*he consults his watch*) ... yes, nearly sixty years (33).

Pozzo refers to his watch once more – in an attempt to estimate when the sun had begun to set (Beckett, 1956: 37) – before finally misplacing his watch, that is, before he ultimately loses all sense of time (Beckett, 1956: 46). Pozzo 'loses' his watch after Lucky's self-castigating 'tirade'. Pozzo loses his sense of time because he no longer possesses the thing that tells the time. Without a functioning intellect, Pozzo is returned to a state of 'blindness':

> POZZO: The blind have no notion of time. The things of time are hidden from them too (Beckett, 1956: 86).

The final example of a Beckettian intellect's refusal to provide certainty about time and space is also taken from *Waiting for Godot*. Tired of waiting for word from

Godot, and wishing to leave, the knowing subject, Estragon, attempts to generate uncertainty, first about the meeting place (space) and then about the time of the meeting:

ESTRAGON: You're sure it was here?

VLADIMIR: What?

ESTRAGON: That we were to wait.

VLADIMIR: He said by the tree. (*They look at the tree.*) Do you see any others?

ESTRAGON: What is it?

VLADIMIR: I don't know. A willow.

ESTRAGON: Where are all the leaves?

VLADIMIR: It must be dead.

ESTRAGON: No more weeping.

VLADIMIR: Or perhaps it isn't the season.

ESTRAGON: Looks to me more like a bush.

VLADIMIR: A shrub.

ESTRAGON: A bush.

VLADIMIR: A—. What are you insinuating? That we've come to the wrong place?

ESTRAGON: He should be here.

VLADIMIR: He didn't say for sure he'd come.

ESTRAGON: And if he doesn't come?

VLADIMIR: We'll come back tomorrow.

ESTRAGON: And then the day after tomorrow.

VLADIMIR: Possibly.

ESTRAGON: And so on.

VLADIMIR: The point is—

ESTRAGON: Until he comes.

VLADIMIR: You're merciless.

ESTRAGON: We came here yesterday.

VLADIMIR: Ah, no, there you're mistaken.

ESTRAGON: What did we do yesterday?

VLADIMIR: What did we do yesterday?

ESTRAGON: Yes.

VLADIMIR: Why ... (*Angrily*). Nothing is certain when you're about.

ESTRAGON: In my opinion we were here.

VLADIMIR: (*looking around*). You recognize the place?

ESTRAGON: I didn't say that.

VLADIMIR: Well?

ESTRAGON: That makes no difference.

VLADIMIR: All the same ... that tree... (*turning towards the auditorium*) ... that bog.

ESTRAGON: You're sure it was this evening?

VLADIMIR: What?

ESTRAGON: That we were to wait.

VLADIMIR: He said Saturday. (*Pause*). I think.

ESTRAGON: You think.

VLADIMIR: I must have made a note of it.

He fumbles in his pockets, bursting with miscellaneous rubbish.

ESTRAGON: (*very insidious*). But what Saturday? And is it Saturday? Is it not rather Sunday? (*Pause.*) Or Monday? (*Pause.*) Or Friday?

VLADIMIR: (*looking wildly about him, as though the date was inscribed in the landscape.*) It's not possible!

ESTRAGON: Or Thursday?

VLADIMIR: What'll we do?

ESTRAGON: If he came yesterday and we weren't here you may be sure he won't come again today.

VLADIMIR: But you say we were here yesterday.

ESTRAGON: I may be mistaken (1956: 15).

Estragon's refusal to assist Vladimir necessarily involves a refusal to perform the very functions for which the knowing subject was generated (WWR 2: 258). That is, Estragon, in having to use the weapons at his disposal, necessarily refuses to provide information regarding space and time—the *a priori* functions of the intellect.

The Will

The fourth and final class of object in the *Fourfold Root* is the human will (White, 1999: 64). In this final class we are each aware of ourselves in introspection as a

subject of willing (Janaway, 2002: 26), that is, in self-consciousness the willing subject is object for the knowing subject (WWR 2: 202; White, 1999: 82):

> Not only the consciousness of other things... but also *self-consciousness* ... contains a knower and a known. Therefore self-consciousness could not exist if there were not in it a known opposed to a knower and different therefrom ... As the known in self-consciousness we find exclusively the will (WWR 2: 202).

We may understand a number of Beckett's characters as subjects of knowing by the way their subjects of willing describe feelings of being surveilled when ostensibly on their own. Beckett tends to represent this subject/object relationship by having the object in question – which in introspection is the willing subject – declare that it is being observed:

> HAMM: All kinds of fantasies! That I'm being watched (Beckett, 1958: 45).

Beckett employs similar language of surveillance on two other occasions to denote the relationship of subject and object, and of the willing subject becoming an object for the knowing subject. In Act II of *Waiting for Godot*, the willing subject, Vladimir, declares:

> At me too someone is looking, of me too someone is saying, he is sleeping... (Beckett, 1956: 91).

As in Acts I and II of *Happy Days*, Winnie, in a similar vein to both Vladimir and Hamm, understands herself as an object:

WINNIE: Strange feeling that someone is looking at me. I am clear, then dim, then gone, then dim again, then clear again, and so on, back and forth, in and out of someone's eye (Beckett, 1961: 18).

And later:

WINNIE: Someone is looking at me still. [*Pause.*] Caring for me still. [*Pause.*] ... Eyes on my eyes (Beckett, 1961: 23).

In self-consciousness the knowing subject experiences the subject of willing as 'feeling' (WWR 1: 109), and, more specifically, the feelings of pleasure and pain. Pleasure and pain are physical responses to motives:

> In the process of willing we *feel* the cause qua motive solicit the respective manifestation of our will. We experience internally and immediately the interaction of motive and will: the will is all ability and potential waiting to be called forth and realized through the approach of the motive (Zöller, 1999: 31)

Schopenhauer refers to this as the 'law of motivation', or cause and effect seen from the viewpoint of self-consciousness: 'Motivation is causation seen from within' (Schopenhauer, 1974a: 214).

It is this process, this interaction between the knowing subject, and the willing subject that I believe Beckett stages in the three plays that constitute his theatre of asceticism. However, whereas Schopenhauer describes the workings of a typical intellect, one that presents an array of motives for action to the willing subject (WWR 2: 223), and either receives feelings of pleasure or pain depending upon their reception (see Janaway, 1989: 236), Beckett, on the other hand, portrays the self-conscious interaction between the knowing subject that refuses, or attempts to refuse, to provide a motive to the willing subject, which in turn expresses its distress at this lack:

HAMM:	(*anguished.*) What's happening, what's happening?
CLOV:	Something is taking its course (Beckett, 1958: 17, 26).

This dynamically sublime process of holding the will at bay by refusing to provide an actionable motive results in the will's protracted suffering. Earlier, I referred to this state of suffering as analogous to Schopenhauerian 'boredom': the experience of 'fearful emptiness' (WWR 1: 312). Such suffering is caused, then, when the individual will is unable to discharge its energy towards a distinct object, for the very lack of such an object. Likewise, what the audience witnesses on the Beckettian stage is the intellect's refusal to provide an actionable motive, and the willing subject's increasing desperation in response to this state of affairs. Again, Beckett gives a voice to these *feelings* (O'Hara, 1981: 265, 267):

WINNIE:	And now? [*Pause. Low.*] Help ... Help, Willie... No? (Beckett, 1961: 28).

It is my contention that the knowing subject's refusal to respond to these feelings by providing a clear motive for action lies at the heart of Beckett's ascetic method.

This understanding of Beckettian tragedy – as the display of a human intellect's attempts to refuse its own will the knowledge that it requires to be able act, or strive – challenges the understanding of Beckettian tragedy that one finds in the works of Cavell (2002), and Critchley (1997). My main criticism of Cavell and Critchley's interpretation of Beckettian tragedy focuses on the ultimate *intent* that both authors believe underlies the on-going attempt to attain a state of meaninglessness. Whereas both Cavell and Critchley understand the refusal of meaning as an attempt on Beckett's part to convey the nihilistic affects of ascribing meaning to life (Cavell, 2002: 150; Critchley, 1997: 179), I, on the other hand, argue that the refusal of meaning is undertaken with the intention of breaking the will, and attaining the will-less state of 'nothing'. I believe the Beckettian intellect does not refuse meaning so that life may then become livable. The Beckettian intellect refuses to ascribe meaning to the world in its efforts to hold the will in a position of unalleviated suffering from which it may freely choose to resign from life (WWR 1: 285, 395). I believe that both Cavell and Critchley's reading of Beckettian tragedy, which understands the refusal of meaning as a task (Cavell, 2002: 150, 156; Critchley, 1997: 179), is one that is indeed supported by the subject matter of the works in question. However, I believe the underlying reason that both Cavell and Critchley provide for the determined attempt to remove meaning from the world – namely to affirm existence – is a claim that is supported by the implicit assertion that the role of art is to affirm existence. This claim is valid only if one reads Beckettian tragedy through the lens of Nietzschean aesthetics, which, as I have argued elsewhere, is to read Beckettian tragedy in the light of the critic of one of its most significant influences. The assumption that the role of art is to affirm existence (Nietzsche, 1993: 16) in turn leads to the further assumption that the refusal of meaning in Beckettian tragedy is intended with life-affirming affect.

The reading that both Cavell and Critchley provide of Beckettian tragedy as an attempt to affirm existence by removing the meaning that has been ascribed to life, meaning that makes life unlivable, is valid *only* if one understands the refusal to ascribe meaning to life as an end in itself. The fact that in Beckett's theatre of

asceticism something occurs *after* the intellect has refused to ascribe meaning to the world suggests that the refusal of meaning is not an end in itself but a means to an end. The refusal to ascribe meaning is undertaken for the purpose of facilitating the presentation of painful knowledge in the form of an involuntary memory. Thus the Beckettian intellect refuses to provide the comfort of habitual consciousness – that is, a representation of the world in space and time, which positions the needs of the individual will as central – so that information may be provided to the will that acts as a disincentive to *all* further action. The refusal to ascribe meaning to the world is the first part of a two-part ascetic method. This method will be explored at length in Chapters 8 and 9.

Conclusion

In this chapter, and the previous chapter, I have presented the argument Schopenhauer's subjects of willing and knowing provide a productive interpretive framework for understanding the actions of the warring parties of Beckett's middle-period tragedies. The war we witness on the Beckettian stage is a series of skirmishes that occur when the willing subject attempts to compel the knowing subject to present habitual information, and in turn the knowing subject refuses to provide representations that permit the 'will not to suffer' to avoid the suffering of being.

In the previous chapter I argued that we may understand Beckett's dominant characters as willing subjects by the way they behave, in particular the way they strive. In this chapter I have argued that we may understand Beckett's knowing subjects as such by the way they refuse to behave. The very things that Beckett's servants – his slaves and browbeaten spouses – *refuse* to do, namely to present information, or representations, in space and time, are the typical functions of the intellect as described in Schopenhauerian epistemology.

With this understanding of the combatants in place I now turn to the nature of the war itself: asceticism, the deliberate breaking of the will.

PART FOUR:

Schopenhauerian and Beckettian Ethics

Chapter 7: Schopenhauerian Ethics – Asceticism

Introduction: *Observation, Diagnosis, and Cure*

> By the expression *asceticism* ... I understand in the narrower sense this *deliberate* breaking of the will by refusing the agreeable and looking for the disagreeable, the voluntarily chosen way of life of penance and self-chastisement, for the constant mortification of the will (WWR 1: 392).

In an earlier chapter, I discussed the subject of Schopenhauerian ontology (Chapter 5). For Schopenhauer the essence of existence is the will to life, and the fundamental nature, or characteristic of the will is that of ceaseless striving (WWR 1: 148-9). For the will to manifest its nature it objectifies itself in countless individuals who are constantly pitted against one another in the phenomenal realm (see WWR 2: 350). Thus the state of nature is one of perpetual anxiety and fear (WWR 1: 196). It is the fundamental nature of the will, namely to strive, which results in suffering: to live, then, is to strive, and to strive is to suffer: 'suffering is essential to life' (WWR 1: 318; Jacquette, 2005: 116).

As the will has no goal, no end objective, towards which its striving is directed (WWR1: 164), there is, therefore, no end, or limit to one's suffering (WWR 1: 308; (Jacquette, 2000: 45). Thus 'the existence of an individual consists essentially in suffering with no positive end', and because 'suffering robs existence of positive value the existence of the individual has no positive value' (Gemes and Janaway, 2012: 287). This leads Schopenhauer to assert that 'it would be better for us not to exist' (WWR 2: 605). But given that the individual who reaches such a conclusion already exists, what, then, can that individual do about their plight? There are essentially three options: the individual can continue to strive, the individual can

take their own life, or the individual can seek to break their own will.

Building upon an awareness of the temporary painlessness that is said to accompany the aesthetic state – namely that in the state of aesthetic consciousness, one is momentarily freed from desire (will), and thus freed from the suffering that accompanies striving – Schopenhauer presents denial of the will through asceticism as a means of attaining permanent *salvation*:[xli]

> aesthetic pleasure in the beautiful consists, to a large extent, in the fact that, when we enter the state of pure contemplation, we are raised for the moment above all willing, above all desires and cares; we are, so to speak, rid of ourselves. We are no longer the individual that knows in the interest of its constant willing ... but the eternal subject of knowing purified of the will ... From this we can infer how blessed must be the life of a man whose will is silenced not for a few moments, as in the enjoyment of the beautiful, but for ever, indeed completely extinguished, except for the last glimmering spark that maintains the body and is extinguished with it. Such a man who, after many bitter struggles with his own nature, has at last completely conquered, is then left only as pure knowing being ... Nothing can distress or alarm him any more; nothing can any longer move him; for he has cut all the thousand threads of willing which hold us bound to the world, and which as craving, fear, envy, and anger drag us here and there in constant pain (WWR 1: 390).

It is a central claim of Schopenhauerian thought, then, that the very thing that was brought about to facilitate the will's striving, the intellect, can, after having fully comprehended its essential nature as the source of suffering, ultimately attempt 'a negation of the will – a self-negation in which the very distinction between self and world collapses' (Zöller, 1999: 30). Thus in Schopenhauerian thought there is an *observation* – that life is essentially suffering – followed by a *diagnosis* – such

suffering is the result of the arational will-to-life's unappeasable nature – and finally a *cure* (WWR 1: 397) – by ceasing to strive, suffering abates (Atwell, 1995: 17; see also Atwell, 1996: 81; Janaway, 1999b: 13).

In this chapter on the subject of Schopenhauerian ethics, and in the next two chapters on Beckettian ethics, I have two interrelated objectives. The first objective is to explicate Schopenhauer's understanding of asceticism, which is perhaps best understood as a means of *ethical* self-destruction: 'To pursue the path of morality leads to the abolition of the will' (WWR 2: 215). Asceticism is ethical because it destroys the individual's essence, the will, and not merely the phenomenon, the will's 'objectification', or 'body', as is the case with the act of suicide, for example.[xlii]

The result of ethical self-destruction is that it temporarily removes striving and thus suffering from a part of the world. The act of suicide, on the other hand, provides the *space* in which another sentient being shall strive and suffer. Thus:

> The only logically coherent freedom to be sought from the sufferings of the will is not to will death and willfully destroy the self, but to continue to live while quieting the will, in an ultra ascetic submissive attitude of sublime indifference toward both life and death (Jacquette, 2000: 49-50).

The second objective is to analyse Beckettian theatre in the light of Schopenhauer's understanding of ethical self-destruction. It is the central argument of this thesis that the plays *Waiting for Godot, Endgame,* and *Happy Days* can be understood as Beckettian *theatre of asceticism.* Indeed I believe the *staging* of asceticism is Beckett's unique contribution to theatre, as it is, simultaneously, Beckett's unique contribution to ascetic thought to perform asceticism, or, in other words, to *embody* the process which leads to disembodiment.

In addition to this, I contend that Beckettian theatre of asceticism presents the tragic spectator with practical lesson after lesson on the subject of ethical self-destruction. In a systematic manner, Beckettian tragedy explores both effective and ineffective means of breaking one's will. These successful and unsuccessful methods are discussed at length in the next two chapters. As well as this revolutionary approach to the *role of art*, and tragedy in particular, namely that Beckett employs the tragic form to portray a variety of ascetic methods (see my earlier chapter on Beckettian aesthetics, Chapter 4), Beckett also devises a new approach to the *role of asceticism*. Whereas for Schopenhauer, asceticism is a means of maintaining a 'quieted' will (WWR 1: 379), a will already broken by the knowledge that suffering is something that is essential to life, for Beckett asceticism plays a far greater role in providing the knowledge of suffering that results in the will's initial breaking.

The order of the process of transformation for Schopenhauer is this: first the will is 'quieted' or gives up all willing, and then the knowing subject practices asceticism so as to maintain a quieted will. In Beckettian tragedy this order is reversed: first the knowing subject practices asceticism, then the will is quieted, or freely chooses to give up all willing (WWR 1: 395). Thus whilst Schopenhauer argues that knowledge of suffering leads to asceticism (WWR 1: 400), Beckett argues that asceticism leads to knowledge of suffering.

There is a degree of confusion in the secondary literature on Schopenhauer regarding the role of asceticism. Jacquette for example appears to attribute Beckett's position to Schopenhauer:

> The ascetic's indifference to life and death is not the means whereby the will is denied. Rather, the ascetic sets out to break and tame the will to life through a regimen of discipline and suffering, which in turn is meant to lead to the sort of knowledge or enlightenment that more permanently quiets the will (Jacquette, 2000: 49-50).

It is important to understand that for Schopenhauer asceticism is practiced as a means of maintaining a will quieted by knowledge of reality, and that for the later ascetic, Beckett, asceticism is the tactic that brings about such knowledge. This will help us to understand the greater degree of ascetic vehemence that one finds in Beckettian thought when compared to Schopenhauerian thought in *WWR*, Vol. 2, as for Beckett, asceticism plays a far greater role in bringing the individual to an awareness of reality.

In the later Schopenhauerian-informed reading of Beckettian tragedy I argue that the Beckettian knowing subject employs the kind of ascetic practices discussed by Schopenhauer – practices such as celibacy, poverty, self-chastisement, and self-mortification – to guide the individual will to an awareness of the ubiquitous nature of suffering. In short, Beckett employs ascetic practice to present the willing subject with knowledge of its own nature. In addition to this, I argue that Beckett also devises a new, revolutionary, method of ethical self-destruction. This revolutionary method can be understood in simple terms as the non-relief of *boredom*, the intention of which is to cause psychic harm. The non-relief of boredom, through the failure to present a clear motive for action, is part of a uniquely Beckettian, two-stage ascetic method. In the first stage, the intellect opens up a 'perilous zone' (Beckett, 1999: 18-19) by denying the will habitual, and therefore, painless consciousness. In Beckettian terms, habitual knowledge refers to knowledge that conforms to the *a priori* functions of the intellect, that is, representations of empirical objects situated in space and time (Beckett, 1999: 90), which are generated for the benefit of the individual will's striving. In the 'perilous zone' which has opened up because the intellect denies the will an understanding of the world in regard to its own limited needs, the intellect then, instead, presents the will with the uncensored, and therefore painful, knowledge of its own nature, or in Beckettian terms, an awareness of the 'suffering of being' (Beckett, 1999: 18-19).

The Beckettian ascetic method, which I discuss at length in my play-by-play analysis of Beckettian theatre of asceticism, draws upon the human capacity to *reason*, which permits the intellect to hold the will at bay, or to stand back from the will's instinctive imperatives (WWR 1: 202; WWR 2: 205). It is not the received understanding of reason which Beckett utilizes, namely the ability to weigh up the pros and cons of alternative points of view, and then come to a conclusion, but rather the deliberative quality of reason. It is the possibility of *not reaching a conclusion*, of not presenting the will with a clear course of action, and thus preventing the will from being able to act that Beckett explores at length in his tragic works:

> LUCKY: On the other hand ... with some exceptions ... for reasons unknown ... but not so fast ... (1956: 42-43).

This is a reading of Beckettian tragedy, then, which understands Beckett's work as an important event in the history, and development, of ascetic thought. To better understand the import of Beckett's contribution to that history, it is important that we understand Beckett's work in relation to Schopenhauer, one of the advocates of asceticism whose work appears to have had a significant bearing on Beckettian asceticism. Only by first comprehending the theoretical foundation upon which Beckettian asceticism is built can one then also appreciate the major development of ascetic thought and practice that one finds in Beckettian tragedy. I therefore begin by outlining Schopenhauer's understanding of asceticism.

Definition of asceticism

For Schopenhauer asceticism 'is denial of the will-to-life' (WWR 2: 615), the 'intentional mortification of one's own will' (WWR 2: 613):

> In 'denial of the will to life', one turns against the particular manifestation of the will to life found in oneself, which means turning against the body, and against one's own individuality. Thus one ceases, as much as possible, to strive for one's own egoistic ends, ceases to avoid suffering or to seek pleasure, ceases to desire propagation of the species, or any sexual gratification ... (Janaway, 2002: 111).

The purpose of strict ascetic practice is not to break, or quiet, the will – as Schopenhauer believes that the will can only be broken by the *knowledge* that all that exists is essentially a single, undifferentiated, entity, the nature of which is the cause of suffering – but rather to ensure that the will, which has already been quieted by such knowledge, does not spark back to life and assert itself once more:

> We must not imagine that, after the denial of the will-to-life has once appeared through knowledge that has become a quieter of the will, such denial no longer waivers or falters, and we can rest on it as inherited property. On the contrary, it must be achieved afresh by constant struggle. For as the body is the will itself only in the form of objectivity ... that whole will-to-life exists potentially so long as the body lives, and is always striving to reach actuality and to burn afresh with all its intensity (WWR 1: 391).

In contrast to other means of self-destruction, such as the act of suicide, which perpetuates suffering (see Chapter 10 on this subject), asceticism is presented as a regime of systematic, and *ethical* self-destruction, which can be understood as an attempt to *maintain* the will's quieted state by depriving it of the means to strive; thus ascetic practice manifests itself in the practice of celibacy (WWR 1: 380), poverty (WWR 1: 381-2), fasting, self castigation, and self-mortification (WWR 1: 382), all practices designed to inhibit the will's ability to spark back to life by depriving it of the motivation to do so. The ascetic, who 'has their true and ultimate

welfare in mind' deliberately makes his or her life 'as poor, hard and cheerless as possible' (WWR 2: 638).

To better understand the role that asceticism plays in maintaining a quieted will, one must first understand how the will is broken. For Schopenhauer only *knowledge* can lead to resignation: 'The will itself cannot be abolished by anything except knowledge' (WWR 1: 400).

If a person is to 'quiet' his or her individual will, the knowing subject must provide the willing aspect of himself or herself with a particular kind of knowledge: namely 'the most perfect knowledge of its own nature' (WWR 1: 233, 307-8; see Zöller, 1999: 37); that is, one becomes conscious 'of the identity of one's own inner being with that of all things, or with the kernel of the world' (WWR 2: 613). When a person identifies his or her essential being with all that exists, he or she enters into a state of 'mysticism'. In addition to the knowledge that existence is comprised of a single entity, the willing aspect simultaneously gains the 'knowledge of its inner conflict and its essential vanity', which expresses itself 'in the suffering of all that lives' (WWR 1: 397).

Thus denial of the will occurs when knowledge acts as a quieter of the will, instead of motivating it, which is typically the case (WWR 1: 308, 334, 379, 397). For as we have seen, when the intellect represents the world in terms of the principle of sufficient reason, the will understands itself as an individual in a world which is populated by other, innumerable, individuals who are in constant competition with one another for limited resources. When the intellect represents the world in this 'illusory' way (WWR 1: 397) it presents all objects which exist in space and time as potential motives for action (Atwell, 1995: 154). In so doing the intellect hereby affirms the will, promotes striving, and encourages suffering in the form of constant anxiety, and infliction of harm to others. In contrast to this, 'knowledge of the whole becomes the quieter of all and every willing' (WWR 1: 379). Essentially, by 'quieting', Schopenhauer understands that the will-to-life within the individual

is 'switched off', and 'my deep-lying natural dispositions to respond to motives are no more'. As a result of this, the subject continues to exist though now it does so not in connection to a particular body but, rather, as 'a disembodied point of view of the world' (Gemes, 2012: 286).

By representing the world as one, then, the intellect provides a 'radical disincentive' for action (Zöller, 1999: 38):

> A person who is not totally immersed in egoism and is able to see through the *principium individuationis* realizes his kinship with everything that exists around him. The whole world seems as close to him as his own person seems to the egoist. Endowed with a holistic knowledge, and overwhelmed with empathy with all living things, such a person finds the nature of this world and its sufferings unacceptable, and no longer wishes to chase the motives of his selfish projects through endless willing (Singh, 2010: 133-4; see also Janaway, 1999b: 12).

How, then, according to Schopenhauer, does a person acquire knowledge of ubiquitous suffering?

Two Paths to asceticism

In Schopenhauerian thought the knowledge of the essential nature of suffering dawns on a person in one of two ways: one 'path' is through an awareness of the suffering of others, whilst another 'path' to such awareness is through personally felt suffering:

> The difference, that we have described as two paths, is whether that knowledge is called forth by suffering which is merely and simply *known* and freely appropriated by our seeing through the *principium individuationis*, or by suffering immediately felt by ourselves (WWR 1: 397).

The first path to breaking the will, the 'narrow path of the elect' (WWR 2: 638) is the path taken by the 'magnanimous person' (Atwell, 1990: 191), or 'saint'. Schopenhauer describes this particular means of acquiring knowledge as a 'rare exception'.

On the first 'path' the person appropriates the sufferings of the whole world (WWR 2: 638). The person who follows this path leads a life of virtue. Understanding *intuitively* that all is one (WWR 1: 368), and, therefore, that the suffering of 'others' is also his or her own suffering, the virtuous, or compassionate, person attempts at all times to alleviate suffering wherever it is found. However, virtue is only the penultimate step (WWR 2: 608) on the path to 'salvation' (WWR 2: 634). The highest good consists in 'denial of the will' (WWR 1: 362; see Young, 2005: 188). The move from virtue to asceticism (WWR 1: 380) comes when the virtuous person understands the ubiquitous nature of suffering, and that the 'ceaseless efforts to banish suffering achieve nothing more than a change in its form' (WWR 1: 315). Recognizing that the world is 'full of misery' because the essence of the world, the will, generates such misery by striving tirelessly (WWR 1: 380), the compassionate person ultimately understands that the only true painkiller is the non-provision of painkiller (see Beckett, 1958: 14, 16, 23, 34, 46):

> And with this insight comes a transformation of the way in which one's identification with the transcendental self expresses itself. Previously it expressed itself in the triumph over egoism ... now, however, one ... 'renounces' life (WWR 1: 379), realising it to be irredeemably worthless ... one ceases to identify with *anything*... (Young, 1987: 124).

Schopenhauer describes this lack of identification with anything as the greatest indifference to all things' (WWR 1: 380). Once again, in this instance, merely *knowing* the suffering of others is sufficient for the will to resign from life.

The second path (WWR 1: 393) that leads to the understanding that suffering is essential to willed life – the 'next best course' (WWR 2: 638) – is that of personally felt suffering. Schopenhauer defines suffering in terms of one's continuing to lack something which one continues to want:

> We call its [the will's] hindrance through an obstacle placed between it and its temporary goal, *suffering* (WWR 1: 309).

> For all suffering is simply nothing but unfulfilled and thwarted willing. (WWR 1: 363)

On the whole, it is the feeling of intense disappointment that accompanies on-going frustration that Schopenhauer believes provides the necessary encouragement to resign from life:

> In fact, suffering is the process of purification by which alone man is in most cases sanctified, in other words, led back from the path of error of the will-to-life (WWR 2: 636).

Such a person experiences so much loss, or frustration, and experiences so much anxiety and disappointment as to lose interest in life (Jacquette, 2000: 45):

> We then see the man suddenly retire into himself, after he is brought to the verge of despair through all the stages of increasing affliction with the most violent resistance. We see him know himself and the world, change his whole nature, rise above himself and above all suffering, as if purified and sanctified by it, in inviolable peace, bliss, and sublimity, willingly renounce everything he formally desired with the greatest vehemence, and gladly welcome death. It is the gleam of silver that suddenly appears from the purifying flame of suffering, the gleam of the denial of the will-to-life, of salvation. Occasionally we see even those who were very wicked purified to this degree by the deepest grief and sorrow; they have become different and are completely converted... (WWR 1: 392-3).

In the 'next best course' it is the loss of interest in life – a situation brought about by unalleviated, personally felt, suffering – that allows the willing subject to understand that all is 'one' (WWR 1: 394). When one's own striving is halted by personally felt suffering, one ceases to act and think in an egoistic fashion. Ceasing to act in an egoistic manner allows one to see through the veil of Maya. Having lost interest in his or her own life, the individual, who had once attempted to avoid personally felt suffering, now deliberately inflicts suffering in the form of ascetic practice. Where the person had previously suffered because of his or her attempts to appease the desires of the will, that person now welcomes suffering in his or her attempts to maintain the broken will's silence. Of course, Schopenhauer is aware that most people either lack empathy, or simply continue to strive regardless of personal suffering, and thus enter onto neither 'path':

> It is always an exception, when such a life [of striving] suffers an interruption through the fact that either the aesthetic demand for contemplation or the ethical demand for renunciation proceeds from knowledge independent of the service of the will, and directed to the inner nature of the world in general. Most men are pursued by want

> throughout their lives, without being allowed to come to their senses (WWR 1: 327-8).

For most, the imperative of the will's striving cannot be denied. This imperative is such that even though a person may gain some understanding of the essential nature of suffering, he or she fails to act upon this knowledge, and instead continues to strive:

> At times, in the hard experience of our own sufferings or in the vividly recognized sufferings of others, knowledge of the vanity and bitterness of life comes close to us who are still enveloped in the veil of Maya. We would like to deprive desires of their sting, close the entry to all suffering, purify and sanctify ourselves by complete and final resignation. But the illusion of the phenomenon soon ensnares us again, and its motives set the will in motion once more; we cannot tear ourselves free. The allurements of hope, the flattery of the present, the sweetness of pleasures, the well-being that falls to the lot of our person amid the lamentations of a suffering world governed by chance and error, all these draw us back to it, and rivet the bonds anew (WWR 1: 379; see also WWR 2: 638).

This returns the discussion to a topic that I touched upon at the end of an earlier chapter on the subject of willing (Chapter 5): the topic of 'free will'. Why is it that some people continue to strive despite an awareness of ubiquitous suffering? The answer in short is that one's ceasing to strive is always a matter of 'grace' (WWR 1: 404). Whilst the intellect may present the willing subject with the knowledge of ubiquitous suffering, such knowledge does not have a causal effect. That is, there is 'no causal explanation of the denial of the will' (Atwell, 1995: 159). One cannot assume that if the will gains an understanding of universal suffering, either by the first or second path to such knowledge, it will *necessarily* result in the will's resignation. That is simply not the case. Suffering does not cause the will to be

broken, but presents an opportunity for the will to freely choose to abolish itself (WWR 1: 285, 395). In some cases the will freely chooses to cease. In the vast majority of cases the will chooses to continue striving:

> So it remains true that I can produce no radical effect in my life. If the transition to asceticism happens at all, it happens *to* me rather than *through* me. (Young, 2005: 193).

Whilst I believe it is the case that Beckett shares Schopenhauer's understanding of 'grace', whereby it is the primary will that must choose to turn its back on life, I believe it also the case that Beckett sees a far more active role for the knowing subject in placing the will in a position of such suffering that it freely chooses to resign from life. Because Beckett understands asceticism's role as a series of actions that lead to an understanding of ubiquitous suffering, Beckett necessarily sees the role of the intellect as far more *active* when it comes to providing the will with such knowledge. The Beckettian intellect, then, is not a 'passive' entity that can do little but wait for the will to understand its essence (Weller, 2005: 81). The Beckettian knowing subject deliberately inflicts suffering to promote the acquisition of the knowledge of suffering by its willing aspect. I believe Beckettian tragedy presents the argument that the knowing subject's chances of having its will resign from life are markedly improved if that knowing subject holds fast to his or her regime of ascetic practice, and refuses to present the will with an actionable motive. In this way Beckett seeks to solve the problem of the will's becoming ensnared in life once more (Cf. WWR 1: 379). In short, by continually denying the will an actionable motive, by relentlessly presenting the will with an opportunity to freely choose to resign (WWR 1: 395), the knowing subject increases its chances of being freed.

Beckett and the 'second path' to knowledge of suffering

It is Schopenhauer's second path to the knowledge of ubiquitous suffering – namely that of personally felt suffering – that I believe Beckett explores at length in his theatre of asceticism. The Beckettian willing subject, the 'will not to suffer', is brought to an understanding of ubiquitous suffering via the two stage ascetic method I have already discussed. Employing structural features of the Schopenhauerian dynamically sublime, the Beckettian intellect *deliberately* refuses the willing subject painless, habitual knowledge so that it might then gain an understanding of the suffering it has caused or endured.

In the next two chapters on the subject of Beckettian asceticism, I present the argument that the Beckettian intellect *intentionally* guides the willing subject along the second path to an understanding of ubiquitous suffering. The Beckettian intellect, then, unlike the Schopenhauerian intellect, practices asceticism *prior to* the will's breaking. Thus Beckettian asceticism – deliberately inflicted, personally felt, suffering – leads to knowledge of suffering *per se*. However, before undertaking this analysis, it is necessary to set out Schopenhauer's understanding of 'traditional' ascetic methods. These methods, which Beckett incorporates into his theatre of asceticism, focus primarily on resisting bodily needs and desires, they assist the ascetic practitioner to preserve the state of resignation first brought about by the knowledge that all is 'one', and that suffering is therefore ubiquitous. For although knowledge can lead to resignation, this state, if achieved, requires maintenance. Vigilance is required, as the individual remains embodied. As long as the last vestige of the will, the body, remains, it is always possible for the will – in the form of instincts and desires – to spark back into life:[xliii]

> Therefore we see... those who have once attained to denial of the will, strive with all their might to keep to this path by self-imposed renunciations of every kind, by a penitent and hard way of life, and by

> looking for what is disagreeable to them; all this in order to suppress the will that is constantly springing up afresh (WWR 1: 391-2).

What, then, are the methods by which the ascetic attempts to maintain the denial of his or her will? Though Schopenhauer discusses a number of ascetic methods, there are essentially five core tactics, which may be employed simultaneously. These methods are celibacy, poverty, fasting, self-castigation, and self-torture (WWR 1: 380-2; 388).

Of all the methods for denying the will-to-life, Schopenhauer sees *celibacy* as the 'first step in asceticism' (WWR 1: 380). Celibacy is asceticism's 'central point', (WWR 2: 625) as 'voluntary and complete chastity ... goes beyond the individual life, and thus announces that the will, whose phenomenon is the body, ceases with the life of this body' (WWR 1: 380). In essence, celibacy ultimately denies the will-to-life the very fuel with which to strive, and thus to cause suffering. The rationale for *voluntary and intentional poverty* on the other hand is to prevent the will from 'backsliding' (Young, 1987: 125). Unlike the compassionate person who gives away property with the sole intention of alleviating the suffering of others, the ascetic renounces property with the intention of causing his or her own suffering, and in the hope of denying the will the means to strive:

> So that the satisfaction of desires, the sweets of life, may not again stir the will, of which self-knowledge has conceived a horror (WWR 1: 381-382).

Similarly, *fasting*, *self-castigation*, and *self-torture* are posited as ways the ascetic ensures the will cannot 'reignite'. The ascetic nourishes the body 'sparingly lest its vigorous flourishing and thriving should animate afresh and excite more strongly the will of which it is the mere expression and mirror' (WWR 1: 382). At the same time that the ascetic barely maintains his or her physical life, he or she also

continues to make the will suffer through the means of self-castigation, where one accuses oneself one's own misdeeds, and physical suffering (self-torture). With the will subdued, the ascetic may then continue to experience the world as the painless, pure subject of knowledge (WWR 1: 197), which, unlike the mere knowing subject is, unencumbered by the insatiable desires of the individual will:

> To see the world as a whole from which I am not distinct is of value because it liberates me from the treadmill of striving, happiness, and suffering ... (Janaway, 2002: 114).

It should be noted that Schopenhauer moderates his views on ascetic practice in the second volume of *WWR*. In Chapter XLVIII, 'On the Doctrine of the Denial of the Will-to-Life', Schopenhauer claims that self-mortification is most likely unnecessary for the ascetic to attain his or her goal of sedating the will:

> Justice itself is the hairy garment that causes its owner constant hardship, and philanthropy that gives away what is necessary provides us with constant fasting (WWR 2: 607).

Similarly, in the second volume, the concept of self-castigation is tempered by the concept of humility (WWR 2: 607). Whilst Schopenhauer's tempering of his stance towards extreme acts of asceticism in the second volume of *WWR* in no way suggests that Schopenhauerian thought ultimately returns to a 'middle way' – a rejection of extreme acts in all their forms, be they asceticism or materialism (Singh, 2007: 93; 2010: 152) – it does mark a point of difference with the consistently extreme asceticism one finds in Beckettian tragedy.

In the next two chapters, in which I read Beckettian tragedy in the light of Schopenhauerian ascetic theory, I argue that Beckett systematically incorporates

many of the abovementioned methods of ascetic practice discussed in *WWR* vol. 1 into his own work. In *Waiting for Godot* we witness the practice of poverty (1956: 12), celibacy combined with self-mortification (1956: 16), self-castigation (1956: 44, 73), and self-mortification (1956: 25) amongst others. In *Endgame* we are shown the practice of self-castigation (1958: 48), fasting (1958: 14), and celibacy (1958: 15, 35, 50) amid an array of ascetic methods. Similarly in *Happy Days* we observe the practice of combined celibacy and self-mortification (1961: 1, 23), and a vow of silence (Act II) as part of an overall attempt to break the will.

One may note that self-mortification and self-castigation play an important part in Beckettian ascetic practice. Beckettian asceticism, then, appears to call into question Schopenhauer's later contention that a less strident form of asceticism is adequate. The ascetic practice one finds in Beckettian tragedy is, if anything, more vehement than that found in *The World as Will and Representation.* One possible reason for this is that asceticism plays a more significant role in Beckett's system, in that Beckettian asceticism generates knowledge of suffering. Whereas Schopenhauer understands asceticism's role as an *ex post facto* means of ensuring that the fire of the will's already extinguished desire remains extinguished, Beckett understands asceticism as an *ex-ante* means of encouraging the will to freely choose to extinguish itself. We may note, then, that Schopenhauer's reappraisal of the need to practice self-mortification in *WWR* vol. 2 is challenged in Beckettian theatre by the character of Lucky in *Waiting for* Godot. And whereas in *WWR* vol. 2, Schopenhauer suggests that the practice of humility, and not self-castigation, is sufficient for maintaining a quieted will, in Beckettian tragedy self-castigation plays a pivotal role in bringing the will to consciousness of the suffering of itself and others, and by so doing promoting resignation. Indeed, a number of Beckettian intellects – Lucky, Clov, and Nell – successfully employ the ascetic method of self-castigation in an attempt to disabuse the willing subject of any self-delusion. This, then, in addition to the fact Beckett finds it necessary to develop his own ascetic method, in the form of the non-provision of representations, suggests that Beckettian thought is – with respect to its life-denying tendency – more ruthless than Schopenhauerian philosophy.

However, before discussing the more vehement version of asceticism that Beckett employs in a number of his tragic works, I shall first turn to the important matter of what can be said about the experience had by a person whose individual will has been broken by the knowledge of suffering, namely 'nothing'. In the fields of philosophy, English literature, and comparative literature, there is a consistent approach regarding Beckett's position on one's ability to attain the state of 'nothingness', namely that Beckett advocates a line of thinking that suggests that nothingness is longed for but ultimately unattainable. In short, Beckett's works affirm existence by portraying the failure to deny or refuse existence. Arguments about the affirmative nature of Beckettian tragedy are supported by claims that a number of Beckett's works are unending, or at least ambiguous enough to preclude certainty regarding whether or not the works reach a conclusion.[xliv] I believe that this position regarding Beckett and the subject of 'nothingness' can be challenged by reading Beckett's work in the light of Schopenhauer's conception of nothingness, namely that 'nothing' is not something, and therefore cannot be shown. In short, I believe it can be argued that Beckett endorses Schopenhauer's philosophical position on the inability of philosophy to represent the world-lessness of the successful ascetic.

Schopenhauerian Nothingness

At the end of the first volume of *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer concludes his philosophical account of existence with the word 'nothing', which is the point at which subject and object cease to exist (WWR 1: 411). This is the state reached by the person who has *quieted* his or her individual will with knowledge of ubiquitous suffering, and an understanding that all is 'one'. With the quieting of the will, the knowing subject ceases to be. Schopenhauer's central point is this: the world of representation is a manifestation of the 'tertiary' part of the will (WWR 1: 292), the intellect. The intellect's primary function is to serve the will by assisting it in its determination to strive by providing it with a spatial and temporal understanding of the world. The knowing subject does not

exist independently of the will. Once the will has resigned from life, the world of representation also comes to an end:

> Denial, abolition, turning of the will are also abolition and disappearance of the world, of its mirror... No will: no representation, no world (WWR 1: 410-11).

Once the will resigns, and the servant of the will is simultaneously 'liberated' (Atwell, 1996: 82), the individual – perhaps best understood as 'individual-no-more' – continues to experience the world, though now as the will-free, 'pure subject of knowledge' (WWR 1: 198). The individual-no-more is left with a form of consciousness, then, though consciousness of what one cannot say because of the absence of the very thing which usually provides such descriptions, i.e. the subject of knowing (WWR 1: 410). Schopenhauer does not then proceed to give an account of what the state of nothing might be like because such an account would transgress the role of philosophy:

> Philosophy has its value and virtue in its rejection of all assumptions that cannot be substantiated, and in its acceptance as its data only of that which can be proved with certainty in the external world given by perception, in the forms constituting our intellect for the apprehension of the world, and in the consciousness of one's own self common to all... Its theme must restrict itself to the world, to express from every aspect *what* this world *is*, what it *may be* in its innermost nature, is all that it can honestly achieve. Now it is in keeping with this that, when my teaching reaches its highest point, it assumes a *negative* character, and so ends with a negation. Thus it can speak only of what is denied or given up; but what is gained in place of this, what is laid hold of, it is forced (at the conclusion of the fourth book) to describe as nothing; and it can add only the consolation that it may be merely a relative, not an absolute, nothing (WWR 2: 611-12).

If the state of nothingness cannot be described, how can it be said to have occurred? 'Nothing' can *only* be represented as an absence of something. The Schopenhauerian conception of nothing, then, is one which is 'essentially relative, and always refers to a definite something that it negates' (WWR 1: 409). In this case, when compared to the 'something' that *is*, namely the world as representation, the nothing of will-lessness is viewed as the loss of the world as representation:

> ... what remains after the complete abolition of the will is, for all who are still full of the will, assuredly nothing (WWR 1: 412).

What Schopenhauer means by this is that to the person who continues to strive, the resigned person appears as one who fails to strive. That is, to the willing individual, the resigned person's body no longer does what the body ordinarily does. The freedom of the will becomes visible as body but does not get expressed as the body normally appears (Atwell, 1995: 161-2). Resignation, then, can only be perceived as an absence, or the lack of some attribute:

> But the only case where that freedom [of the will] can become immediately visible in the phenomenon is the one where it makes an end of what appears, and because the mere phenomenon, in so far as it is a link in the chain of causes, namely the living body, still continues to exist in time that contains only phenomena, the will, manifesting itself through this phenomenon, is then in contradiction with it, since it denies what the phenomenon expresses...The whole body is the visible expression of the will-to-life, yet the motives corresponding to this will no longer act (WWR 1: 402-3; also see Atwell, 1995: 161-2).

Schopenhauer's conception of 'nothing' as that which exists once one has been delivered from a life of willing (WWR 1: 409), is vital for an alternative understanding of the way Beckett conducts and concludes a number of his ascetic tragedies.

Beckettian Nothingness

To date, it has been acknowledged that a number of Beckett's characters may *attempt* to resign (Weller, 2006: 193) but that such attempts invariably fail. Beckett's philosophical interpreters typically understand Beckett's tragedies as life affirming works,[xlv] and a significant aspect of this interpretation is Beckett's supposed refusal to give into nihilism (Weller, 2005: 11-21). An important part of this refusal on Beckett's part is the determination to 'go on' (Badiou, 2003: 73). It is within this framework that the Beckettian tragic ending is presently conceived. For a Beckett tragedy to end, then, would evince a determination not to 'go on', would be 'nihilistic'. Similarly, the Beckettian tragic ending is viewed as open-ended, and thus open to a number of interpretations. It is because of this supposed open-endedness that Beckett's work is understood to be both thematically and structurally open to the 'Other' (Weller, 2006: 27-8).

Adorno's early critical work on the play *Endgame* is important in this regard. Noting that at the end of the play the character Clov does not physically exit the bunker, Adorno states that:

> Whether the game ends in a stalemate or in an eternal check, or whether Clov wins, is not made clear, as though too much certainty about this would provide too much meaning (Adorno, 1991: 270).

Similarly, Esslin presents the end of *Endgame* as an uncertain event: 'When the curtain falls, he is still there. It remains open whether he will really leave' (1961: 49).

In line with this early understanding, later interpreters have continued to advocate that Beckett's 'endings' fail to end. In a number of his works on Beckett, Weller has argued that the failure to attain the state of nothingness is the very message of Beckett's art:

> Crucially... in Beckett the negations repeatedly fail to deliver the very 'nothing' they seem to promise, and it is this failure that comes to constitute the very stuff of the work (Weller, 2006: 193; see also (2005: 23; 2009: 39)

In agreement with Weller, fellow post-structuralist interpreter Peter Boxall argues that:

> Beckett's writing ... does not constitute a nothingness made palpable, but rather performs an endlessly failed reaching for a nothingness which gives rise to the work, which the work seeks endlessly to name, but which remains forever beyond the grasp of those forms which are its only manifestation (Boxall, 2010: 31).

It is this reading of Beckettian art, one which interprets Beckett's failure to *represent* nothingness as failure to *attain* nothingness that I wish to challenge.

I believe interpretations such as those presented in the work of Adorno, Weller, and Boxall may conflate the spectator's perspective with that of the character's perspective. The statement, 'Clov appears to be there for the audience' is conflated with the statement, 'The audience is still there for Clov'. There appears to be a

tendency in Beckettian interpretation to require Beckett to show 'nothing' happening, otherwise the goal of achieving nothing is said to have failed. However, regarding the supposed failure to attain the state of nothingness at the end of a number of Beckett's tragedies, it is not so much the case that Beckett does not present nothingness at the end of his work, rather it is the case that he *cannot* do so.

The open-ended interpretation of the 'nothingness' that one finds in Beckett's work appears to stem from the belief that nothingness must be shown before it can be said to have occurred. This position sets Beckett an impossible task. What the spectator witnesses when watching works such as *Waiting for* Godot, and *Endgame* is what Simon Critchley refers to as an attempt to describe the 'impossible but necessary', a capturing through narration what narration cannot capture, namely the 'radical unrepresentability of death' (Critchley, 1997: 160-1). However, rather than capturing 'death', as Critchley sees it, I believe Beckett is attempting to capture the unrepresentability of the ascetic's world-lessness after the resignation of the will. Beckett can only portray this world-lessness as *nothing happening*. Here Beckettian tragedy follows a similar line to Schopenhauerian thought regarding the unrepresentability of the state of 'nothing'. As Weller correctly points out, from 'the standpoint of philosophy', there can be only "negative knowledge" of that which lies on the other side of this negation ...' (Schopenhauer, WWR 1: 410; cited in Weller, 2005: 82-3). Because of this, the individual who crosses over into asceticism does not vanish, they are still embodied, but their embodiment is *for us* the audience alone. The resigned person does not disappear into thin air, so to speak, for although the individual will has resigned, the body remains (WWR 1: 391), and continues to be represented as an object in the mind of he or she who continues to strive, i.e., in the mind of the spectator to the performance.

One's comprehension of nothingness depends, then, upon one's status, be it as one who continues to will, or as one in whom the will has been broken:

> We freely acknowledge that what remains after the complete abolition of the will is, for all who are still full of will, assuredly nothing. But also conversely, to those in whom the will has turned and denied itself, this very real world of ours with all its suns and galaxies, is—nothing (WWR 1: 411-12).

In other words, 'nothing' is a matter of point-of-view:

> the world is there for those persons who will it to be there, for those who affirm the will to life; but the world is not there for those who do not will it to be there, for those who do not affirm, but rather deny, the will (Atwell, 1995: 168-9).[xlvi]

It follows that what the audience sees is not what the ascetic character sees. The ascetic's perception is fundamentally unrepresentable. And this is the 'impossible' task Beckett has set himself. Philosophy and art can lead one up to an understanding of 'nothing' but cannot show it because language only exists on this side of that understanding. Given this, *Endgame*, for example, takes us up to the point where the game comes to an end, where a 'quieting of the will' (in Schopenhauerian terms) occurs, but the quieting is unrepresentable other than as 'nothing happening'. Beckett is attempting to depict the impossible: namely, the possibility of nothingness. It is simply asking too much of Beckett as a tragedian to demand that 'nothing' is first shown through the absence of he or she who longs for the state of 'nothingness' before 'nothing' can then be said to have occurred.

To return to an earlier argument, one that I presented in the 'retort to the secondary, philosophical literature on Beckettian art' in Chapter 2, I believe there is an underlying reason that Beckett's middle-period tragedies are consistently interpreted as unending events. This underlying reason appears to be the reliance upon Nietzsche's interpretation of 'nothing' as nihilism. When understood in the

light of Schopenhauer's work, Beckettian tragedy comes to a conclusion by depicting, to the best of the author's ability, the state of nothingness. However, when interpreted in the light of Nietzsche's understanding of nothing as nihilism, 'nothing' is understood as problem, and must therefore be discounted as a possibility. It is only by first conceiving of 'nothing' as nihilism, and therefore as a problem, that it then becomes necessary to defend Beckett's work from accusations of nihilism by denying the possibility that nothing happens.

Conclusion

In this chapter I provided an outline of Schopenhauer's understanding of asceticism as the '*deliberate* breaking of the will by refusing the agreeable and looking for the disagreeable' (WWR 1: 392). I also argued that this understanding of asceticism provides a productive framework for understanding Beckettian tragedy. With regards to the way that Beckettian tragedy both utilizes and develops this central aspect of Schopenhauerian ethics, I have made the following claims. Whereas Schopenhauerian asceticism focuses on bodily deprivation, acts such as celibacy, and fasting, Beckettian asceticism also seeks to deprive the individual will of the information it needs to be able to strive. To this end, the Beckettian ascetic deprives its individual will of the energy to strive, *and* the knowledge that it needs to be able to strive.

Unlike Schopenhauerian philosophy, which understands the practice of asceticism as something one undertakes *after* the will has been broken by knowledge, Beckettian tragedy presents asceticism as a series of actions one undertakes so as to gain knowledge of suffering. Beckettian asceticism is an *ex-ante*, not *ex post facto*, act.

In addition to this I claimed that Beckettian asceticism is a more vehement version of asceticism than Schopenhauerian asceticism because of the role Beckett ascribes

to it. Whilst in Schopenhauerian thought asceticism is a response to the knowledge that 'the world is full of misery' (WWR 1: 400), in Beckettian tragedy asceticism provides this knowledge to the will. It is because of this that Beckettian asceticism makes none of the concessions to ascetic moderation that Schopenhauer makes in Volume 2 of *The World as Will and Representation.*

Finally, in regard to the claims of a number of Beckett's interpreters that Beckettian tragedy is a life-affirming art form because one cannot say for certain that each work reaches a conclusion, I argued that this position does not take into account the artist' inability to show 'nothing' as an event that has occurred, rather the only way that Beckett can represent 'nothing' is by depicting the absence of traits once possessed by the individual prior to resignation.

Chapter 8: Beckettian Ethics – Asceticism, Part One: *Waiting for Godot*

General Introduction to Beckettian Ethics

Much has already been written on the subject of the *ethicality* of Beckett's work (Weller, 2006: 28-9; Weller, 2010c: 118-129). Throughout the history of Beckett interpretation, Beckett's prose and theatre has been read in the light of many of the major ethical schools. In the edited collection, *Beckett and Ethics*, Smith notes that the approach to the subject of Beckett's ethicality has been highly influenced by the framework that interpreters bring to Beckett's work. Citing the history of Beckettian ethical interpretation from the early humanist understanding (Esslin (1961), through to readings guided by deconstructionist thought (Connor (1988), Locatelli (1990), Hill (1990)), and then on to later works by Badiou (2003) and Weller (2005, 2006) that centre on the concepts of the 'event' and 'negation', respectively (2008: 5-10), Smith suggests that when providing an answer to the question 'is there anything of ethical value in Beckett's writing?' one's answer will 'depend, of course, on what you understand by ethics...' (Smith, 2008: 1).

It is my contention that Beckett's philosophical interpreters have for the most part considered the affirmation of life as the only legitimate ethical approach to life, and as a consequence of this understanding a life-affirming ethical framework has been used to interpret Beckett's ethics. The dominance of this approach has meant that Beckett's work has not, to any great extent – particularly in the philosophical realm – been read in the light of ethical systems that advocate quietism, and life-denial. I have discussed the exceptions to this position in the introduction to this thesis.

In the case of Beckett interpretation, then, the ethical value of Beckett's work has been determined by what has been omitted from consideration, as much as it has been determined by the ideas that have become an established aspect of the Beckettian interpretive framework. The life-denying ethics of Schopenhauerian thought in particular, has had little part to play in the philosophical interpretation of Beckett's ethics. When Beckett's engagement with Schopenhauerian ethics is raised – in that Beckett appears to endorse Schopenhauer's contention that the negation of the will is the 'only properly ethical act' – it is argued that Beckett's quietist characters ultimately fail to attain the goal of Schopenhauerian quietism, namely to attain the state of nothingness (see, for example, Weller, 2006: 193; 2005: 75-96), which therefore renders an implicit critique of Schopenhauer's position. According to this view, Beckett's characters may seek to resign from life, however Beckett's art reveals the impossibility of that desire.[xlvii]

The following two chapters will set out an alternative reading of Beckett's middle-period tragedies. I will seek to understand Beckett's utilization of Schopenhauerian ethics in the formulation of his own ethical position: ethical self-destruction. It is my contention that Beckettian tragedy can be understood not only a sustained engagement with Schopenhauerian aesthetic theory but also as a sustained engagement with Schopenhauerian ethics.

Whereas Schopenhauer is the first Western philosopher to systematically establish asceticism as *the* legitimate response to the suffering that is generated by one's internal drives, Beckett, I believe, is the first thinker known to be influenced by Schopenhauer to not only incorporate Schopenhauerian ascetic thought into the fabric of his own work (Young, 2005: 246), but to build upon it. Beckett's middle-period tragedies are not merely the reiteration of Schopenhauerian asceticism in theatrical form. Beckett's tragedies can be understood as the systematic response to another system of thought, a response that ultimately devises its own *method* for denying and breaking the will. At the heart of this method is the refusal to present a clear motive for action.

Focussing on Beckett's engagement with Schopenhauerian ethics in a manner that is free from the lens of life-affirming thought allows us to perceive Beckett's unique and complex response to the problem of the suffering that invariably accompanies the endless compulsion to strive (WWR 1: 310), namely the intentional generation, and exacerbation of the experience of *boredom*, which is brought about by the deliberate generation of *uncertainty*. I believe it can be argued that Beckett's method of both generating and perpetuating mental torment, or *anguish*, for the purpose of breaking the will is a significant contribution to the field of ethics.

In the following reading of Beckett's work, Beckett's tragedies are considered ethical because they advocate for the destruction of the will-not-to-suffer, the part of the 'I' that causes harm to oneself and to others. In contrast to existing interpretation where Beckett's tragedies are considered ethical because they ennoble the human condition after the death of God (Esslin, 1961), or because they affirm difference by holding on to the possibility of 'one' becoming 'two', and thus the possibility of 'love' (Badiou (*On Beckett)*, 2003: 44, 4), or because they evince the repeated *failure* to *entirely* negate life itself (Weller 2006, 193), I argue that Beckett's tragedies are ethical because they propose an effective *cure* for an existence otherwise comprised of tireless striving and endless suffering. Beckett's work does this by providing a method for the destruction of the part of oneself that strives, namely the individual will. This method utilizes traditional methods of asceticism, in combination with the uniquely Beckettian ascetic method of *boredom*.[xlviii]

The following reading of Beckettian tragedy is one that understands the barrenness of Beckett's landscapes and interior spaces as an embodiment of the human mind experiencing *boredom*. More specifically, I believe it is the embodiment of mechanistic boredom first elucidated in Schopenhauerian thought: the mind minus a motive, experiencing the full force of willing (WWR 1: 364).

This reading is performed with the intention of contributing to the body of work already undertaken in relation to Beckett and the subject of boredom – work that attempts to make sense of Beckettian 'boredom' by interpreting it in the light of Adornian (Brooker, 2001; Phillips, 2003), and Heideggerian (Phillips, 2009; Weller, 2009) thought – but also to contrast with this existing work by pursuing a *genetic* approach to understanding Beckettian tragedy. In this chapter I argue that Beckett incorporates Schopenhauer's understanding of boredom into a method of ascetic practice. Unlike Schopenhauer, Beckett is aware of the destructive potential of boredom, and thus seeks to deliberately generate boredom as a state of being.

The first thing that needs to be clarified in an attempt to understand Beckett's utilization of Schopenhauer's understanding of boredom is the term 'boredom' (*Langeweile*) itself. As Young indicates, the word boredom fails to satisfactorily convey 'the complex existential malaise Schopenhauer wishes to describe' (Young, 1987: 141). To fully comprehend what Schopenhauer means by the term boredom, one needs to look to the way Schopenhauer describes the state. For Schopenhauer, boredom is an awareness that:

> ... life has no *genuine intrinsic worth*, but is kept in motion merely by want and illusion. But as soon as this comes to a standstill, the utter barrenness and emptiness of existence become apparent' (Schopenhauer, 1974b Vol. 2: 287).

Schopenhauer also describes the experience of boredom as:

> ... a lifeless longing without a definite object, a deadening languor (WWR 1: 164).

> ... a fearful emptiness [in which] existence itself becomes an intolerable burden (WWR 1: 312).

And, finally:

> ... a feeling of the most frightful desolation and emptiness (WWR 1: 364).

In an earlier chapter on the willing aspect of Beckett's theatrical pseudocouples (Chapter 5) I endorsed a reading of *Endgame*, which posited the stage setting as an 'immense skull', where the events on the stage were the thoughts occurring inside that skull (Kenner in Boxall, 2000: 75; see also Esslin, 1961: 50; Chambers, 1976: 7). I believe that this understanding of interiority can be extended to include the two other tragedies of Beckett's theatre of asceticism. In addition to this, I contend that each of these settings can be interpreted as the evocation of a mind in which a knowing subject deprives its individual will of an actionable motive. In short, each tragic setting reveals the consequence of Beckettian ascetic practice: the experience of unalleviated boredom.

We see this understanding of boredom mirrored in the austerity of the Beckett's tragic settings:

> POZZO: What's it like?
>
> VLADIMIR: (*looking around*). It's indescribable. It's like nothing. There's nothing (Beckett, 1956: 86-7).

We may compare Vladimir's description of his experience in *Waiting for Godot* with the later settings for Beckett's other ascetic tragedies. First in *Endgame*:

Bare Interior.

Grey light (Beckett, 1958: 11).

And later in *Happy Days*:

Expanse of scorched earth rising centre to a low mound .... Very pompier tromp-l'oeil backcloth to represent unbroken plain and sky receding to meet in far distance (Beckett, 1961: 1).

On each occasion, Beckett provides a setting that represents the consequences of the intellect's refusal to provide the willing subject with an actionable motive. Without a clear motive for action, the willing subject encounters a 'barren' (Schopenhauer, 1974b Vol. 2: 287), 'empty' (WWR 1: 312) world.

The following two chapters are an exploration of the Beckettian ascetic method of promoting uncertainty and irresolution, the intention of which is to generate boredom in the Schopenhauerian sense of the term, namely the experience of 'desolation' (WWR 1: 364). This unique Beckettian, two-stage ascetic method, which first generates boredom, and, then provides the will with knowledge of suffering, utilizes Schopenhauer's two-part conception of the *dynamically sublime.* To facilitate further discussion, I shall now reiterate this two-part, Beckettian ascetic method – the Beckettian dynamically sublime – in full.

In the Beckettian dynamically sublime, the intellect, or knowing subject holds the will at bay (WWR 1: 202) by refusing to provide a *clear* motive for action (WWR 1: 364), that is, a representation subject to the principal of sufficient reason. By utilizing its negative freedom to resist the demands of the will not to suffer

(Shapshay, 2012b: 25, 28), the knowing subject denies the individual will the painless experience of habitual consciousness. When held in this 'perilous zone' (Beckett, 1999: 18-19) between moments of habitual perception, the individual will suffers in two distinct ways: it suffers the pain of lacking an object towards which it may expend its energy – or, in other words, the will experiences the effects of unalleviated 'boredom' (WWR 1: 164, 312, 364) – and it suffers from the knowledge (WWR 1: 400) it receives instead of habitual consciousness, namely knowledge about the ubiquitous nature of suffering (WWR 1: 315, 397).

Thus it is only partly true to say that 'Beckett's subject is ignorance rather than knowledge' (O'Hara, 1981: 257) as a number of Beckett's interpreters claim (see also Rosen, 1976: 15). The provision of knowledge regarding the ubiquitous nature of suffering is the second part of the Beckettian dynamically sublime ascetic method. Denied painless habitual consciousness, the individual will is revealed to itself – via an 'involuntary memory' – 'the total past sensation' (Beckett, 1999: 72-3), or, the 'reality' (Beckett, 1999: 22, 33) of an event, beyond mere utility – either as a being that has suffered at the hands of others, or as a being that has caused others to suffer. This sudden awareness of past suffering is itself a cause of suffering. Ultimately such knowledge is brought to mind for the purpose of presenting the individual will with the opportunity to freely choose to resign from life (WWR 1: 285, 395). Involuntary memory provides the individual will with a radical disincentive for action (Zöller, 1999: 38).

Thus the Beckettian dynamically sublime may be understood as a process where the intellect 'refuses the agreeable' – habitual consciousness – and, rather, 'looks for the disagreeable' – knowledge of suffering – in its attempts to break the will (WWR 1: 392). It is this complex method of ethical self-destruction that I will now explore through a process of textual analysis.[xlix] Having provided an introduction to the subject of Beckettian ethics, the rest of this chapter is dedicated to a detailed analysis of the play, *Waiting for Godot.*

Waiting for Godot

In *Waiting for Godot* the Beckettian intellectual characters of Lucky and Estragon are defined by both their understanding of, and their approach to, the subject of boredom. Whereas Lucky understands boredom as an opportunity to promote the cessation of striving, and thus seeks to exacerbate the experience of boredom, Estragon understands boredom as the cause of his suffering, and instead attempts to alleviate it.

Similarly, towards the end of the second volume of *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer distinguishes the behaviour of the person who attempts to avoid suffering from that of the person who deliberately generates suffering, that is, Schopenhauer distinguishes the vast majority of humanity from the ascetic practitioner. Most people in their attempts to ensure a 'secure and pleasant existence' 'chain' their will 'ever more firmly to life, thus ensuring their suffering continues'. In contrast to this, the ascetic 'deliberately makes their life as poor, hard and cheerless as possible, because they have their true and ultimate welfare in view' (WWR 2: 638). The behaviour of the ascetic announces to the world that suffering can only come to an end if one refuses to relieve it with a motive, or, in Beckettian terms, the intellect fails to provide a 'painkiller' (Beckett 1958: 14, 16, 23, 34, 46). I believe that this understanding regarding a person's approach to suffering is a productive way of understanding Beckett's knowing subjects in *Waiting for Godot.* Whereas Estragon seeks a 'secure and pleasant existence' for himself, Lucky 'deliberately' makes life as 'poor, hard and cheerless as possible'. Estragon is not an ascetic practitioner. Estragon is an intellectual 'Everyman': an intellect that informs its will that suffering is something which one can avoid through further striving. Estragon is an intellect that mistakenly believes his individual will can change. Estragon does not want to break his will; rather he wishes his will to will something other than what it does. Essentially, Estragon does not understand the idea of intelligible 'character': 'the intelligible character of

every man is to be regarded as an act of will outside time, and thus indivisible, and unalterable' (WWR 1: 289).

In contrast to Estragon, Lucky is an ascetic: an intellect that takes every opportunity to inflict suffering upon his willing aspect in his attempts to place the individual will in a position of suffering from which it freely chooses to resign from life (WWR 1: 285). Unlike Estragon, Lucky understands that his character cannot be altered, rather it must be eliminated (Schopenhauer, 2005: 54; see also Atwell, 1990: 38; 1995: 163). In short, the two intellects, Estragon and Lucky, provide very different *knowledge* to their respective will regarding the essential nature of the world and of suffering. The former informs its will that suffering can be avoided. The latter intellect communicates to its will the knowledge that suffering is essential to its very nature.

Pozzo and Lucky: From Solipsism to an Awareness of the Suffering Other

In the preceding chapter on the subject of Schopenhauerian asceticism, I discussed Schopenhauer's 'cure' for the suffering that is caused by the essential, tirelessly striving nature of the will: namely the practice of suppressing bodily needs (Atwell, 1995: 17). I believe that Beckett's theatre of asceticism builds upon this understanding. Having gained an appreciation that life is essentially one of suffering, the knowing subject, Lucky, subsequently understands his own individual will, Pozzo, as the cause of his suffering, and attempts to communicate this knowledge to Pozzo through ascetic practice. Lucky, then, is 'a sick man applying a painful cure':

> He endures the pain caused by the cure, since he knows that the more he suffers, the more is the substance of the disease destroyed; and thus the present pain is the measure of the cure (WWR 1: 397).

In Schopenhauerian terms, Lucky 'refuses the agreeable and looks for the disagreeable' in his attempts to mortify the will (WWR 1: 392). In addition to this claim, I contend that Lucky is a *successful* ascetic, in that his actions permit his willing subject, Pozzo, to suffer to such an extent that Pozzo freely chooses to resign from life. Given this claim of Lucky's ascetic 'success', it then becomes important to note the methods of ascetic practice that Lucky employs, as they may then be compared to the successful, and unsuccessful, methods of Beckett's other tragic ascetics.

Before commencing this discussion of Beckett's approach to asceticism – that of generating suffering in the form of boredom through the creation, or non-cessation, of uncertainty – I shall first set out Lucky's utilization of 'standard', or 'traditional', means of breaking the will, as described by Schopenhauer in *The World as Will and Representation* (Vol. 1: 380-2; 388). In his persistent attempts to make his willing aspect suffer, Lucky carries out a wide array of ascetic acts, including acts of self-mortification, fasting, and self-castigation. With regards to the ascetic method of self-mortification, Lucky continually burdens himself with a heavy bag, which he never puts down, even when sleeping (Beckett, 1956: 25). In addition to this, we discover at the end of Act II that the bag is filled with nothing but sand (Beckett, 1956: 21, 88). The bag, then, holds nothing of value other than for the fact that carrying it causes Lucky to suffer. To answer Estragon's question as to why Lucky doesn't put down his bags, it is because he wants to endure the physical pain of carrying a heavy load (Beckett, 1956: 25). As well as enduring the weight of an unnecessary burden, Lucky also does nothing to prevent the running sore that has formed on his neck where the knot of the rope with which Pozzo controls him has rubbed him raw (Beckett, 1956: 25). We know from Schopenhauer that the practicing ascetic takes every opportunity that presents itself to receive, and to perpetuate suffering:

> ... every injury, every ignominy, every outrage. He gladly accepts them as the opportunity for giving himself the certainty that he no longer affirms the will (WWR 1: 382).

In his attempts to break the will, Lucky also resorts to the act of fasting when he refuses the chicken bones to which he, as Pozzo's carrier, is entitled (Beckett, 1956: 27).

The combination of these ascetic practices is performed with one purpose in mind:

> that by constant privation and suffering, he may more and more break down and kill the will that he recognises and abhors as the source of his own suffering existence and of the world's (WWR 1: 382).

By employing these 'standard', or 'traditional', ascetic methods of bodily deprivation, Beckett provides the audience with a means of understanding the other self-destructive aspects of Lucky's behaviour, namely that which Pozzo describes as Lucky's 'thinking'. Whereas Lucky had once thought 'very prettily', providing Pozzo with a great deal of knowledge about the ways of the world, his thoughts are now said to make Pozzo 'shudder' (Beckett, 1956: 39):

> POZZO: (*groaning, clutching his head*). I can't bear it... any longer... the way he goes on... you've no idea... it's terrible...he must go... (*he waves his arms*) ... I'm going mad... (*he collapses, his head in his hands*)... I can't bear it... any longer... ... (*sobbing*). He used to be so kind... so helpful... and entertaining... my good angel... and now... he's killing me (Beckett, 1956: 34).

Lucky's 'thinking' should be viewed in the light of his other self-destructive behaviour: the *way* Lucky now thinks is another means of generating suffering with the intention of breaking the will. In short, Lucky's use of the more traditional methods of asceticism alerts us to the fact that his seemingly odd behaviour (the way he dances and thinks) is a more unconventional method of asceticism. Whereas the 'traditional' forms of asceticism, namely fasting, and self-mortification, focus on undermining the body, the objectification of the will, Lucky's way of 'thinking' is a form of psychic self-harm. Other 'traditional' means of asceticism deprive the body of the energy it needs to strive. Lucky's 'thinking' deprives the will of the *information* it needs to strive; it deprives the will of certainty about the world. Deprived of certainty, of a clear motive for action, the will is left in a frustrated state. Lucky's way of thinking causes the 'will not to suffer' (Beckett, 1999: 43) to suffer by depriving it of habitual thought.

First part of the Beckettian Dynamically Sublime: Representational Deprivation—Holding the Will at Bay

In addition to the utilization of Schopenhauerian asceticism, I believe the Beckettian ascetic method – the deprivation of habitual thought – also utilizes and further develops a number of the non-ascetic tenets of Schopenhauerian philosophy. The first of these non-ascetic aspects of Schopenhauerian thought that Beckett transforms into an aspect of ascetic practice is the concept of 'motivation'.

Earlier (Chapter 5), I stated that Schopenhauer understands motivation, or the introspectively experienced response to a stimulus, in the following way: Character + Motive = Action (WWR 1: 106). Thus we have two essential components for an action to occur. The first is the individual will, or character: what I am determines whether or not I shall respond, and how I respond if I do so. The second component is a motive: a stimulus is presented to the will by the intellect, and the will either responds or does not respond to this stimulus based

upon its inherent nature. In Beckettian asceticism this formula has been radically reformulated so that the will is deprived of the requisite motivation. In other words: Character – Motive (Representation) = Inaction.

Deprived of a *clear* motive for action, the individual will cannot discharge its energy towards a target or goal. This accumulation of energy causes the will to suffer, as an inability to strive towards an object causes pain (WWR 1: 364). Again this appears to utilize a Schopenhauerian understanding of experience – in this case of *suffering* – and, once again, the utilization of Schopenhauerian thought is carried out in a such a way as to transcend the original understanding. I refer the reader back to an earlier discussion of the two 'paths', or ways, by which Schopenhauer believes the will is led to resign from life. In particular, I refer back to the discussion of the second path to resignation: that of personally felt suffering. I believe that Beckett utilizes Schopenhauer's understanding of suffering, which 'is simply nothing but unfulfilled and thwarted willing' (WWR 1: 363), to deliberately break the will. By deliberately denying Pozzo the information the willing subject requires to be able to act (WWR 1: 309), Lucky is intentionally inflicting the kind of suffering that comes with the mental state of boredom.

What, then, does Lucky 'think' (Beckett, 1956: 42) when he is ordered to think? Lucky provides the appearance of reasoned thought, with the standard features of argument, counter-argument, qualifications, and so on. However, in essence Lucky's speech provides only the *form* of such an argument, minus the *content.* Lucky provides merely the appearance of 'thinking'. Lucky's 'tirade' (Beckett, 1956: 42) in Act I of *Waiting for Godot* is a complex process of refusing to provide Pozzo with a *clear*, and therefore usable, motive for action. Habitual knowledge is denied to the individual will through a series of endless qualifications and professions of uncertainty. In the following passage I have isolated these particular aspects:

LUCKY: On the other hand ... with some exceptions for reasons unknown... for reasons unknown... but not so fast...

> left unfinished ... beyond all doubt all other doubt than that which clings to the labours of men... but not so fast for reasons unknown... left unfinished for reasons unknown... left unfinished... for reasons unknown... for reasons unknown... for reasons unknown... approximately by and large more or less... for reasons unknown... in light of the labours lost ... the light of the labours lost... in the year of their Lord six hundred and something... for reasons unknown... but not so fast... for reasons unknown... the labours abandoned left unfinished... abandoned unfinished... unfinished... (Beckett, 1956: 42-45).

That Lucky's way of 'thinking' causes his willing subject to suffer is shown in the original stage directions:

> *Pozzo dejected and disgusted... Pozzo's sufferings increase ... Pozzo more and more agitated and groaning* (Beckett, 1956: 42).

Here we witness the first aspect of Beckettian asceticism in action: the generation of uncertainty through the refusal to provide a clear motive for action in the form of a judgement. As I discussed in an earlier chapter on the subject of the knowing subject (Chapter 6), in Schopenhauerian epistemology there are four kinds of object in the world – empirical objects, concepts, space and time, and the individual human will – because the knowing subject is capable of generating these four kinds of object. Lucky's ascetic practice revolves around the knowing subject's inherent capacity to form concepts, the second class of object in the Schopenhauerian fourfold root. Concepts are representations of representations, which the knowing subject combines in a logical way to form judgements (Schopenhauer, 1974a: 154-156). Lucky's way of thinking prevents this process from occurring. Rather, in each case, Lucky presents a concept or thought which,

for a number of reasons, lacks resolution, and by so presenting such unresolved material precludes the addition of a further concept that then permits a judgment to be formed. This in turn prevents the will from acting, as the individual will, or 'character', cannot act without a motive.

It is, therefore, not a refusal to provide a motive *per se*.[l] Rather, Beckettian asceticism appears to be an exaggeration of the human capacity to reason, and the indecision that necessarily stems from the ability to behave in a non-reflexive, or non-instinctive manner (WWR 1: 205-6). In short, Samuel Beckett uses the human capacity to reason to destroy the individual will. It is the very thing about reason that Schopenhauer, and, subsequently, Nietzsche (Nietzsche, 1997: 81), criticises, namely reason's 'ephectic' quality – that it permits one to prevaricate, to put off, and delay – which Beckett utilizes to such great effect in his middle period tragedies.

The most significant advance on Schopenhauer's life-denying thought is Beckett's use of 'reason' as a capacity of the human mind to destroy one's inner drives. Schopenhauer, as we have seen, dismisses the utility of reason in destroying one's will (WWR 1: 185-6, 190).[li] Beckett, on the other hand, finds something in reason, which Schopenhauerian thought cannot accommodate. Reason permits deliberation (WWR 2: 205-6), and in Beckettian theatre, deliberation creates irresolution. Irresolution proves to be an effective means of causing unbearable suffering.

The very import of Lucky's famous rambling monologue in Act I of *Godot* is the awareness that a conclusion can only be reached by not reaching a conclusion:

LUCKY: On the other hand...with some exceptions, for reasons unknown... but not so fast ... labours left unfinished... beyond all doubt all other doubt than that which

> clings to the labours of men... in light of the labours lost ... abandoned ... unfinished ... (Beckett, 1956: 44-45).

The phrase 'for reasons unknown' is said ten times. The word 'unfinished' is said some seven times. Indeed, Lucky 'finishes' with the word 'unfinished'.

Beckett's engagement with Schopenhauerian thought, in particular Schopenhauer's understanding of ascetic practice, results in an interesting Beckettian move regarding the utility of reason. Schopenhauer views reason as a mere device of the will for attaining its aims. Reasoned thought has its foundations in immediate perception, and is therefore merely an abstracted understanding of phenomenal material – that is, the world divided by the mind into space and time (WWR 1: 40). Because of this reason is unable to show the will 'reality', that is, its underlying unity prior to the mind's division. Thus reason cannot be employed to break the will.

Beckett, on the other hand, discovers something in the human capacity to reason that Schopenhauer' system cannot accommodate. It is the deliberative quality that comes with the capacity for reason that Beckett employs. Reason permits human beings to fail to come to a conclusion. Reason permits unending deliberation. This unending deliberation is presented in Beckettian theatre as a means of breaking the will by allowing it to remain in a state of frustrated irresolution. It is humanity's ability to think ephectically, to *suspend judgement*, which lies at the heart of Beckettian asceticism as displayed in Beckettian tragedy. This is not a stoic understanding of the utility of reason, where one can deploy reason to *avoid* suffering (see Uhlmann, 2008), that is, upon reflection find an answer to one's problems, and chart an appropriate course of action. Rather, reason can be used to *cause* suffering. Beckett's 'reason' is a matter of *doing nothing*. Reason's central Beckettian function is to reveal the fundamental inability of reason to overcome the suffering that comes from striving. Unlike the stoic's understanding of reason,

then, in Beckett's theatre of asceticism reason's only, and therefore, ultimate utility is to show that nothing one *does* will result in painlessness. Doing nothing is the only solution. The consequence of doing nothing is 'boredom'.

Boredom

Beckettian uncertainty, or indeterminacy is a *means to an end*, a penultimate step in Beckettian ascetic practice. In Beckett's middle-period tragedies the *tactic* of uncertainty or indeterminacy is a key ascetic method employed by the intellect, or Beckettian knowing subject, in its attempts to deny the will a motive, thus generating the state of boredom, and by so doing placing the will in a position of suffering from which it may freely choose to resign from life.

In Schopenhauerian thought the experience of boredom is an important mechanism for ensuring that the individual continues to strive. Boredom is a key aspect in the *cycle of striving*, wherein the individual constantly transitions from one desire to the next. For Schopenhauer, boredom is the state experienced after the attainment of one desire, and prior to the pursuit of another. In boredom one experiences the 'pressure of the will', but since it has no 'motive' on which to fix, an 'inner torment' results. The individual experiences the pain of longing *per se*, that is, longing without any definite object towards which one's energies and attention can be directed (Young, 2005: 212 citing WWR 1: 364).

It is important to note that Schopenhauer limits his discussion of boredom to an understanding of its effects, and its purpose, namely that boredom is a means to ensure that human beings are never satisfied, and that the intellect continues to present motives to the will. But whereas Schopenhauer leaves his discussion of boredom at the level of description, Beckett goes further than this by utilizing the effects of boredom in ascetic practice: In Beckett's middle-period tragedies

boredom is a 'perilous zone' (Beckett, 1999: 18) of 'fearful emptiness' (WWR 1: 312), which the Beckettian intellect enters and refuses to leave:

> LUCKY: On the other hand... but not so fast... but not so fast... (1956: 42-3).

In Beckett's tragedies, the knowing subject's refusal to ascribe meaning to the events of the world is a *life-denying* task. Lucky's behaviour is a deliberate attempt by the intellect to hold the Lucky-Pozzo pseudocouple in a state of boredom – 'a lifeless longing without a definite object, a deadening languor' (WWR 1: 164) – by refusing to provide the will with a *genuine* range of motives that then permits the will to simultaneously choose, and to act.

Whereas Lucky once danced the 'farandole, the fling, the brawl, the jig, the fandango, and even the hornpipe', the only dance he now performs, or provides as an option, is 'The Net' (Beckett, 1956: 40), the dance of one who wishes not to dance, but who lacks the freedom to refuse. Thus the only motive that Lucky now presents to Pozzo is a disincentive for action: it offers no 'entertainment' (Beckett, 1956: 34), and provides no relief. Similarly, regarding Lucky's 'thinking', providing a comprehensive list of thinkers – Puncher and Wattmann, Testew and Cunard, Fartov and Belcher, Steinweg and Peterman (Beckett, 1956: 42-4) – lends the appearance of the intellect performing its servile function, namely that of presenting options from which the will may ultimately choose (WWR 2: 207). Looked at more closely, however, Lucky only informs Pozzo of the work of thinkers who have been unable to finish their thoughts, or whose works have been lost (Beckett, 1956: 43-4). Lucky is not providing a motive, a definite object, on which Pozzo can 'fix', and towards which his energies can be directed (WWR 1: 364), rather, Lucky is intentionally generating a key feature of Schopenhauerian boredom: 'a feeling of – eventually acute – frustration' (Young, 2005: 212; Beckett, 1956: 42).

Lucky's behaviour – whether dancing, or thinking – can be understood as an enactment of Beckettian asceticism, which I have presented as the equation of Character – Motive (Representation) = Inaction. Rather than shedding light on the world, as is the typical role of the intellect, Lucky's representation-denying behaviour has its metaphorical equivalent in the fluorescent tube that flickers incessantly, neither providing light nor passing into total darkness. Whilst lending the appearance of an intellect that is trying to perform its illuminatory role (WWR 1: 150), Lucky simply fails to provide Pozzo with a sufficient amount of 'light' to allow him to 'see'.

In defence of this proposition I again draw the reader's attention to Lucky's failure – as Pozzo understands it – to *entertain* (Beckett, 1956: 34). Here, 'entertainment' is to be understood in terms of utility. Even knowledge of the terrible nature of existence is a motive for the will's striving, if the will is not personally affected by such knowledge. Indeed, Pozzo is able to calmly recite the personally *useful* knowledge of others' suffering that Lucky has previously presented to him. He knows, for example, that the 'tears of the world are a constant quantity. For each one who begins to weep, somewhere else another stops' (Beckett, 1956: 33). Yet this knowledge has no effect on his behaviour, for Pozzo continues to strive. Pozzo accumulates deeper knowledge about the nature of the world, then, for the same reason that he positions objects in space and time: to improve his ability to strive:

> POZZO: Guess who taught me all these beautiful things. (*Pause. Pointing to Lucky.*) My Lucky! ... But for him all my thoughts, all my feelings would have been of common things... Beauty, grace, truth of the first water, I knew they were all beyond me. So I took a knook (Beckett, 1956: 33)

However, whereas Lucky had once informed Pozzo about the nature of the world in such a way that Pozzo could recite the content of such thoughts without being

personally affected by it, Lucky now refuses content itself, and in doing so denies Pozzo the relief of mere entertainment. In short, Lucky's ascetic method of irresolution causes Pozzo to experience the kind of suffering he was unable to grasp by merely knowing a series of profundities about 'life'. This, then, is what boredom *does* in Beckettian tragedy: it causes the will *personally felt suffering* (WWR 1: 392-7), which in turn permits knowledge of suffering *per se*.

Second Part of the Beckettian Dynamically Sublime: The Negative Epiphany

It is at this point in the ascetic process, as Pozzo endures the frustration borne of uncertainty and irresolution, that Lucky then proceeds to the second part of the Beckettian ascetic method of psychic self-harm. Having opened up a 'perilous zone', a 'period of transition that separates consecutive adaptations', where Pozzo is allowed to experience the 'suffering of being' (Beckett, 1999: 18-19), Lucky then proceeds to the ascetic method of self-castigation (WWR 1: 382). For as we have seen, 'in the intervals between Habit's changes of screen we suffer because we are presented, harshly, with an uncensored view of the world' (Acheson, 1978: 170). Beckett's ascetic practice is essentially a means of *manufacturing* or *generating* these moments when the will suffers for want of habitual knowledge.

As with other forms of ascetic practice, self-castigation is undertaken with the intention of mortifying the will. In this case, the individual verbally accuses himself or herself as a form of penance. Self-castigation is, essentially, a pronouncement of one's own misdeeds, an attempt to disabuse oneself of self-misperception. As an example of self-misperception, Pozzo declares his nature to be 'liberal' (Beckett, 1956: 39). Thus although Pozzo is a landowner who owns many slaves, his self-perception is that of one who is broad-minded, generous, tolerant, and so on. By preventing Pozzo from lapsing into habitual thought – where he may once again view the world from the position of the egoist – Lucky is able to present Pozzo with an understanding of his true nature, or intelligible character, an understanding

that would otherwise go unacknowledged. This non-habitual knowledge is presented during Lucky's *'tirade'* (Beckett, 1956: 42) – 'a long, angry speech of criticism or accusation... a denunciation' (New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary) – in Act I of *Waiting for Godot.*

Through the presentation of Lucky's tirade we see that Pozzo is unable to understand why it is that his countrymen and women are starving and miserable, 'in spite of the strides of alimentation and defecation', or, in other words 'nutrition and hygiene'. Regardless of these improvements, they continue to 'waste and pine waste and pine', and to 'shrink and dwindle'. To the best of Pozzo's knowledge they should be fit and well, given the 'strides of physical culture the practice of sports such as tennis football running cycling swimming...' (Beckett, 1956: 43). In short, Pozzo appears to have no real awareness of the suffering of others. He assumes that all, like he, have access to food, sanitation, and time for recreation.

Essentially this is the version of the world that the defence of Habit has presented to Pozzo: his version of the world – where, as a wealthy man, he has all he wants and needs – is the only version. Given this, the terrible side of life is inexplicable. People die *despite* all the improvements that had been made to living standards. This, then, is how Pozzo understands past events. However in his 'tirade', Lucky finally breaks through. We know that Lucky is trying to 'kill' Pozzo by 'the way he goes on' (Beckett, 1956: 34). Whilst holding the will at bay by refusing to provide a clear motive for action, Lucky accuses the wealthy landowner, Pozzo, of culpability, of causing others to suffer:

LUCKY: ... in a word the dead loss per caput since the death of Bishop Berkeley being to the tune of one inch four ounce per caput approximately by and large more or less to the nearest decimal good measure round figures stark naked in the stockinged feet in Connemara in a word for reasons unknown... the

> skull... the tears...the skull the skull the skull the skull in Connemara in spite of the tennis... the skull the skull in Connemara in spite of the tennis the skull... (Beckett, 1956: 44-5).

Whereas through 'voluntary' memory – 'the uniform memory of intelligence... relied on to reproduce for our gratified inspection those impressions of the past that were consciously and intelligently formed' (Beckett, 1999: 32-33) – the self-censored version of the famine was that people starved *despite* all that Pozzo and his class had done, and all the improvements that had been made to the quality of life, the involuntary memory – '... the total past sensation, not its echo nor its copy, but the sensation itself, annihilating every spatial and temporal restriction, [which] comes in a rush to engulf the subject in all the beauty of its infallible proportion' (Beckett, 1999: 72-3) – is that people starved to death *because* Pozzo's gains in quality of life, his wealth, had come at the expense of others. Lucky's tirade, then, is ultimately a revelation of the effects of egoism.

Whereas people were once seen to 'waste and pine' amid the sanitized language of 'alimentation and defecation', the more complete, 'involuntary' memory that Lucky now presents of the same events focuses on the horror of poverty and starvation, and the indifference of those whom, as landowners, did nothing to alter the situation, or, indeed, caused it to happen. The more comprehensive recollection of events causes the will to suffer the pain of negative self-knowledge. It is a negative epiphany, which I have defined as a painful awareness of past events; the moment when the individual will – confronted by the suffering of being – understands that it is for the best that it ceases to strive.

In an earlier chapter on the Schopenhauerian subject of willing (Chapter 5), I discussed Schopenhauer's understanding of the individual will as 'character'. For Schopenhauer there are three ways of understanding character: as something 'intelligible', as something 'empirical' WWR 1: 289) and as something that one

'acquires' or fails to acquire (WWR 1: 303, 305). What we observe in the abovementioned ascetic process is the willing subject, Pozzo, being guided by his intellect along the second path to knowledge of suffering to the point where, through personally felt suffering, he 'reaches thoughtfulness' (WWR 1: 253) about suffering *per se*. This is, essentially, a process where Pozzo gains knowledge of his egoistical intelligible character – that which is determined by an act of the will outside time – through observing his empirical character – individual acts of selfishness in response to motives. In this way, Pozzo acquires character, or self-knowledge, of himself as an egoist (WWR 1: 303). Based upon this self-knowledge – painful knowledge of egoism – and knowledge of the suffering generated by acts of egoism, Pozzo freely chooses to resign from life: 'Cognitive self-realization leads to conative self-cancellation' (Janaway, 1999b: 5).

What we observe, then, in Beckett's tragedies is that to acknowledge the existence of the 'Other' is ultimately a destructive event. In Beckett scholarship it is widely argued that Beckett's art promotes the recognition of difference, and that such recognition is a life-affirming act.[lii] However, in Beckett's theatre of asceticism, the 'Other', once acknowledged, arrives in the form of the suffering 'Other'. That we suffer, and that we *all* suffer, that we are 'comrades in distress' (Beckett, 1999: 67), is knowledge about the nature of existence that promotes the willing subject's resignation from life, not affirmation of life. In Beckett's tragedies, the acknowledgement of the 'Other' marks not merely the possibility of moving beyond the solipsist 'one' to the recognition of the existence of 'Two' as it is said to do in Badiouian thought (Badiou, 2003: 16), the recognition of the suffering 'Other' also marks the possibility of 'None' of 'Nothingness'.

Beckett's Depiction of Successful Ascetic Practice

Beckett portrays Lucky's ascetic practice – that of inhibiting the formation of a judgement by presenting a stream of unfinished concepts – as an effective means

of breaking the will, or placing the will in a position of suffering from which it freely chooses to resign from life. That Lucky has been successful in his efforts to 'break' Pozzo – or, in other words, that Lucky has been liberated from servitude and attained the state of 'nothingness' – is portrayed in two ways: through Pozzo's loss of sight (Beckett, 1956: 86), and through Lucky's inability to speak (Beckett, 1956: 89). Earlier, in the preceding chapter, we saw that for Schopenhauer 'nothing', or the state of resignation, can only be depicted negatively, that is, as an absence of something (WWR 1: 409). In the light of this understanding I argued that Beckett cannot therefore show 'nothing' as having occurred. What Beckett can, and does do, however, is show the absence of certain features once possessed by the Pozzo-Lucky pseudocouple. Pozzo's resignation in response to self-knowledge and the knowledge of ubiquitous suffering is signified by his loss of sight. In an earlier chapter on Schopenhauerian and Beckettian ontology (Chapter 5) I discussed Schopenhauer's theory that the 'blind' will had 'kindled a light for itself' (WWR 1: 150) by producing the representation-generating intellect through its ceaseless striving. In Beckett's tragedies ascetic practice is depicted as the process of slowly, and methodically extinguishing that 'light' by depriving the will of a motive, and revealing the reality of ubiquitous suffering. The way that Beckett signifies the success of ascetic practice is through the willing subject's deteriorating sight. Ultimately, Pozzo loses his sight because along with his resignation comes the simultaneous loss of the aspect of the will that represents the world, namely the knowing subject, and the representations it typically generates in space and time, i.e. the world (WWR 1: 411). It is because the will, Pozzo, has resigned, and now lacks an intellect – the very thing that situates things in time – that he no longer has any understanding of time:

> POZZO: The blind have no notion of time. The things of time are hidden from them too (Beckett, 1956: 86).

In addition to this, Pozzo's resignation is also depicted 'negatively' through Lucky's silence, as indeed Beckett typically signifies the knowing subject's dissolution with 'dumbness' (Beckett, 1956: 89) or the inability to respond. Much has already been

written on the subject of whether or not the goal of Beckett's art is silence, and whether silence as an objective is at all possible. It seems that one's understanding of Beckettian silence depends on the interpretive framework that one brings to the work. Though different frameworks are in evidence – Aristotelian (Nussbaum), and a variety of Nietzschean, and Post-Nietzschean approaches (for example, Adorno, Cavell, Deleuze, Blanchot, and Critchley) – the majority position is that silence cannot be achieved (Nussbaum, Adorno, Blanchot, Critchley), or is at best an 'infinite task' (Cavell, 2002: 156).[liii]

In *Narrative Emotions: Beckett's Genealogy of Love*, Martha Nussbaum understands Beckett's art as a project of 'radical undoing' (Nussbaum, 1990: 293):

> Indeed, they themselves [Beckett's voices] make increasingly radical attempts to put an end to the entire project of storytelling and to the forms of life that this practice supports. They ask us to see their forms of feeling as a pattern that can be unravelled, a writing that can be unwritten, a story that can be ended—not by bringing it to the usual happy or unhappy ending but by ending the storytelling life (Nussbaum, 1990: 287-8).

Ultimately, Nussbaum discounts the possibility of the success of the desire for silence because the very attempt to communicate the desire for silence ultimately ensures, albeit reluctantly, the continuation of a particular narrative. In Beckett's case the narrative is the narrative of wishing to end narrative (Nussbaum, 1990, 306-11; see also Erickson, 2007: 265).

Similarly, Adorno views silence as the 'asymptote towards which Beckett's drama tends', though here, silence cannot be reached because the words one uses to reach this goal tend, at the same time, to push it away. Thus, for Adorno, the end of *Endgame* does not mark the moment when silence is accomplished because one

sees in the very need for the accompanying mime *Act Without Words* that 'muteness has not yet been satisfactorily achieved' in *Endgame* (Adorno, 1991: 260).

Countering these viewpoints, Critchley argues that silence can never be the goal of artistic activity, 'rather writing is the necessary desacralization of silence' (Critchley, 1997: 152). In line with his critical progenitor, Maurice Blanchot, who argues that the voice cannot be silenced, Critchley adds that 'although Beckett's protagonists desire to be done with words, to be finally silent', such silence is 'impossible' (Critchley, 1997: 153), 'we have to talk' (Critchley, 1997: 152).

Over against these critics, I argue that in the character of Lucky, Beckett has achieved the seemingly 'impossible'. In *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett has produced an artwork that calls for silence, and achieves silence. In addition to this, Beckett presents the means to bring about silence, or release from servitude, by performing systematic ascetic practice. This ascetic method combines the deprivation of representational knowledge with the more traditional methods of fasting, self-castigation, and self-mortification. The success of this ascetic method is evident in the way that Lucky, having successfully broken his will, is now silent, 'can't even groan' (Beckett, 1956: 89). Lucky no longer *has to talk* because the aspect of the self that compelled him to speak has resigned. Schopenhauer describes the will's resignation in the following way:

> If that veil of Maya, the *principium individuationis*, is lifted from the eyes of a man to such an extent that he no longer makes the egoistical distinction between himself and the person of others, but takes as much interest in the suffering of other individuals as in his own ... then it follows automatically that such a man, recognizing in all beings his own true and innermost self, must also regard the endless sufferings of all that lives as his own, and thus take upon himself the pain of the whole world. No suffering is any longer strange or foreign to him... He knows

> the whole, comprehends its inner nature, and finds it involved in a constant passing away, a vain striving, an inward conflict, and a continual suffering. Wherever he looks he sees suffering humanity, and the suffering animal world, and a world that passes away... The will now turns away from life; it shudders at the pleasures in which it recognizes the affirmation of life (WWR 1: 378-9).

Schopenhauer's understanding, that through personally felt suffering one gains an understanding of 'oneness', and with it an understanding of the universal suffering of the will's fleeting phenomenal objectifications, finds its equivalent in Pozzo's recital of the knowledge he now possesses:

> POZZO: (*suddenly furious*). Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time! It's abominable! When! When! One day, is that not enough for you, one day like any other day, one day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second, is that not enough for you? (*Calmer*). They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more (Beckett, 1956: 89).

Here Pozzo recounts the knowledge that led him to resign.[liv] It is the negative epiphany of ubiquitous suffering that permits Pozzo to see through the *principium individuationis*, or the principle of individuation. The next section on the pseudocouple of Vladimir and Estragon discusses the reasons that Vladimir is unable to reach a comparable state of resignation, but instead continues to strive.

Estragon and Vladimir

ESTRAGON: (*giving up again*) Nothing to be done.

VLADIMIR: I'm beginning to come around to that opinion. All my life I've tried to put it from me, saying, Vladimir, be reasonable, you haven't yet tried everything. And I resumed the struggle (Beckett, 1956: 9).

Why is it the case that unlike the play's other willing subject, Pozzo, Vladimir is unable to understand the essential, suffering, nature of life? What is the reason that Vladimir is unable to 'go on' (Beckett, 1956: 91) suffering, that is, endure personally felt suffering, and thus gain an understanding of suffering *per se*? As a means of exploring this problem, I shall re-state Schopenhauer's understanding of 'ensnarement', which was first cited in the previous chapter on Schopenhauerian asceticism:

> At times, in the hard experience of our own sufferings or in the vividly recognized sufferings of others, knowledge of the vanity and bitterness of life comes close to us who are still enveloped in the veil of Maya. We would like to deprive desires of their sting, close the entry to all suffering, purify and sanctify ourselves by complete and final resignation. But the illusion of the phenomenon soon ensnares us again, and its motives set the will in motion once more; we cannot tear ourselves free. The allurements of hope, the flattery of the present, the sweetness of pleasures, the well-being that falls to the lot of our person amid the lamentations of a suffering world governed by chance and error, all these draw us back to it, and rivet the bonds anew (WWR 1: 379).

Schopenhauer's understanding of *ensnarement* provides us with an effective means of comprehending Vladimir's inability to gain the requisite knowledge of suffering to resign from the life of striving. Working within this interpretive framework, I argue that the knowledge the knowing subject, Estragon, presents to Vladimir – namely that suffering can be avoided – prevents Vladimir from suffering sufficiently, and from acquiring knowledge of suffering by suffering. It is, therefore, an argument that places great emphasis on the stage direction that precedes Estragon's first line: *giving up again* (Beckett, 1956: 9). In short, unlike the Pozzo-Lucky pseudocouple, the Vladimir-Estragon pseudocouple is unable to proceed along the second path to knowledge of suffering, and thus gain knowledge of suffering *per se*. Instead, Vladimir-Estragon is left to wait interminably by the side of a country road (Beckett, 1956: 7).

In the previous section on the intellectual character, Lucky, I argued that Lucky's seemingly bizarre behaviour could be understood in the light of the more 'traditional' methods of ascetic practice such as self-mortification, and fasting: Lucky's *way* of thinking is a unique form of *psychic* self-torment, at the heart of which is the state of unalleviated *boredom*. Estragon's behaviour, on the other hand, can be understood as the inverse of ascetic practice. The role that Estragon performs in *Waiting for Godot* is that of a counterpoint to the role performed by Lucky. Whereas Lucky is indeed a fortunate knowing subject to have devised a successful means for quieting his will, and thus to experience 'grace' in the form of the will's decision to resign (WWR 1: 404), Estragon stands in for the vast majority of humanity whom in the face of ubiquitous suffering caused by striving continue to believe that suffering can be alleviated by further striving. In contrast to Lucky who is an exceptional individual, Estragon is something of an intellectual 'Everyman' whose desire to ensure a 'secure and pleasant existence' (WWR 2: 638) merely ensures that his willing aspect continues to strive, and thus that the Vladimir-Estragon pseudocouple continues to suffer. In contrast to Lucky, then, who has ceased to perform his role as servant of the will (WWR 2: 216), Estragon continues to carry out this function. Thus whilst Estragon certainly denies Vladimir knowledge in space and time (the third class of objects in the fourfold root), his attempts at generating uncertainty are not carried out with the intention of

breaking his will, of causing his will to permanently resign but, rather, to have his will desire *something else*. Estragon's goal may be understood as an attempt to alter the object of desire (presently Godot), and not to ensure that Vladimir is left without an object of desire *per se*.

One can understand Estragon's aversion to boredom in the same way that one can understand Estragon's aversion to other forms of suffering. For Estragon, boredom is merely another form of suffering which one, when acting as a servant of the will, must alleviate. Thus, unlike Lucky, Estragon fails to understand the experience of boredom as an opportunity to break the will, and to bring suffering to a permanent end. In what ways, then, does Estragon attempt to avoid the kind of suffering that Lucky endures? What motifs does Beckett employ to designate Estragon as one who strives to avoid suffering? Whereas Lucky takes every opportunity to mortify the will – both physically and mentally – Estragon attempts to alleviate all physical and mental suffering, from head to toe. Taking my lead from the text, I shall explore Estragon's inability to endure suffering from the ground up, commencing, then, with a discussion of Estragon's aching feet.

Estragon's aversion to suffering is brought to our attention at the very beginning of Act I of *Godot* when we see him struggling to remove his boots, which are evidently too small for his feet and thus causing him great discomfort (Beckett, 1956: 9-12). Estragon later discards the same boots, leaving them for another man with smaller feet, whom he believes the boots will make 'happy' (Beckett, 1956: 52). That Estragon's boots are making him *un*happy would, if he were an ascetic, be reason for him to keep them. The inference here is that Estragon wishes to discard his boots not because such an act will cause him discomfort, but because to do so will provide some relief. This inference is confirmed when Estragon later accepts the boots that have been left by the person whom took his (Beckett, 1956: 69) because life without boots is as painful as it is with them (Beckett, 1956: 48). Estragon fails to go barefoot in the world (like Christ, the ascetic to whom he compares himself) (Beckett, 1956: 52), and he wishes not to experience the pain of boots that are too small for him. In ascetic terms, Estragon's behaviour can be understood as the

failure to endure in suffering, through a failure to self-mortify. His is a constant process of attempting to avoid pain— first the pain of uncomfortable shoes (Beckett, 1956: 12), and then the pain that comes from walking barefoot (Beckett, 1956: 48), and then the pain of uncomfortable shoes (Beckett, 1956: 92), and so on, *ad infinitum*.

But 'that's enough about these boots' (Beckett, 1956: 70). From Estragon's feet, we proceed upwards to Estragon's shins, and to the subjects of compassion and revenge.

In response to Estragon's attempts to provide Lucky with comfort – taking a handkerchief to dry his tears – Lucky kicks Estragon 'violently in the shins' (Beckett, 1956: 32). This an important passage for our understanding of Beckett's thoughts on the subject of compassion, which, much like Schopenhauer, Beckett presents as ultimately futile:

> POZZO: [Lucky has] stopped crying. (*To Estragon.*) You have replaced him as it were. (*Lyrically.*) The tears of the world are a constant quantity. For each one who begins to weep, somewhere else another stops (Beckett, 1956: 33).[lv]

A similar understanding regarding the futility of compassion can be gleaned from the passage that follows shortly after this, where Vladimir first attacks Pozzo for being cruel to his servant, and then, upon hearing Pozzo's pained defence, attacks Lucky for 'crucifying' such a good master (Beckett, 1956: 33-4). To come to the aide of one is to render another vulnerable.

We discover that it was Lucky who taught Pozzo about the futility of compassion (Beckett, 1956: 33), it is also Lucky who 'teaches' Estragon about the value of compassion by kicking Estragon in the shins when Estragon pities him. What does Estragon take from this lesson? Unlike the ascetic who would present the other shin for Lucky to kick (WWR 1: 388), Estragon first spits on Lucky (Beckett, 1956: 33), and later seeks to avenge himself when Lucky is defenceless (Beckett, 1956: 87-88). Unlike Lucky who 'never defends himself' (Beckett, 1956: 87), Estragon avenges himself (which is a form of delayed self-defence) by kicking and abusing Lucky who is lying on the ground. The consequence of revenge is that Estragon suffers anew, as he hurts his foot during the attack. In short, Estragon suffers because he has failed to understand that striving, in whatever form, is suffering (WWR 1: 310). In a world of ubiquitous suffering, *any* attempt to alleviate suffering is ultimately futile. At the same time, in a world where all is 'one', any attempt to inflict suffering is just as senseless because one inflicts suffering upon oneself. As such, the act of revenge is as futile as the act of compassion.

That Estragon is not an ascetic, but, rather, an intellect that seeks to avoid suffering is also revealed by Estragon's attitude to the matter of *poverty*. Estragon requests money, or considers accepting money from Pozzo on a number of occasions (Beckett, 1956: 39, 80-81). These requests permit the audience to understand his presently dire financial circumstance as something which has occurred unintentionally, as opposed to it having been deliberately brought about by, for example, his having taken a vow of poverty (WWR 1: 381-2). The act of asking for money reveals to us that Estragon still holds the opinion that his presently painful situation is one that can be alleviated. By longing to have money, Estragon also longs for the means to alter his present situation. Estragon lives in the hope that suffering can be avoided. We see this worldview manifested in a number of other ways, such as Estragon's desire to go elsewhere – be it to the Pyrenees, or to somewhere 'far away' (Beckett, 1956: 81, 92). In short, Estragon simply fails to understand that it is neither his financial situation, nor his present location that is the cause of his suffering but, rather, his will, Vladimir, and the striving that is essential to his nature:

> But we frequently shut our eyes to the truth, comparable to a bitter medicine, that suffering is essential to life, and therefore does not flow in upon us from the outside, but everyone carries around within himself its perennial source. On the contrary, we are constantly looking for a particular external cause, as it were a pretext for the pain that never leaves us... We then have, so to speak, what we were looking for, namely something that we can denounce at any moment, instead of our own inner nature, as the source of our sufferings (WWR 1: 318).

Remaining at the level of Estragon's pockets, we now proceed to Vladimir's defective prostate, and to the concept of providing *relief.*

Early on in the play we discover that Vladimir has a defective prostate, which is causing him a fair degree of discomfort (Beckett, 1956: 10):

> *Vladimir breaks into a hearty laugh which he immediately stifles, his hand pressed to his pubis, his face contorted.*
>
> VLADIMIR: One daren't even laugh anymore.
>
> ESTRAGON: Dreadful privation (Beckett, 1956: 11)

Later, Estragon deliberately stimulates Vladimir's malfunctioning gland by telling him a story about a drunk Englishman who visits a brothel. This story results in Vladimir's need to urinate, which Estragon watches with much enthusiasm:

> *Gestures of Estragon like those of a spectator encouraging a pugilist* (Beckett, 1956: 16).

There is little doubt that Estragon is deliberately causing Vladimir to suffer. However, the reason that Estragon inflicts self-harm is different to the reason that Lucky inflicts self-harm. Unlike Lucky who inflicts suffering on Pozzo (the body of the Pozzo-Lucky pseudocouple) with the intention of breaking him, Estragon inflicts personally felt suffering for the purpose of *relieving* the discomfort that comes with the state of boredom. It is the desire to relieve the acute frustration (Young, 2005: 212) of boredom that results in Estragon's self-harm. Vladimir's suffering has an element of entertainment to it; something that Beckett denotes with the above-cited stage direction of Estragon's gestures whilst watching Vladimir's discomfort. Deprived of the opportunity to tell Vladimir about his dream (Beckett, 1956: 15-16), and unable to leave the place where they wait for Godot, Estragon takes out his frustration on Vladimir's ailing body. That Estragon's intention is to experience relief and not to generate terminal suffering, is supported by his subsequent wish to embrace Vladimir, after the latter has shown his annoyance at Estragon's behaviour (Beckett, 1956: 17). The lesson that one is to take from such a scene is that relief is a *problem* in Beckettian tragedy. It is for this reason that Vladimir states that after having urinated he feels both 'relieved and at the same time ... appalled... AP-PALLED' (Beckett, 1956: 10-11). It is the vague awareness, then, that the relief of personally felt suffering interrupts the process of bringing suffering to an end that results in Vladimir's dismay.

From ailments of the reproductive system we proceed to the digestive system, and Estragon's stomach. The failure to inflict *self-harm* is also evinced in Estragon's acceptance and pursuit of food. Unlike Lucky, who refuses sustenance, Estragon accepts food from Vladimir and Pozzo (Beckett, 1956: 20, 27, 68). One of the consistently utilized motifs of Beckettian ascetic tragedy is that of food, and either a character's acceptance, or rejection of sustenance. An intellectual character that fails to fast also fails to inhibit the will's capacity to strive (WWR 1: 382). Thus we see that whilst Estragon accepts food, Lucky does not. In Beckettian theatre there is a direct correlation between a character's longing not to suffer and their continuing to do so. In the previous section on Lucky, I suggested that his refusal of chicken bones (Beckett, 1956: 27) was a deliberate attempt to promote suffering,

and to deny the will the fuel to strive. By eating, then, Estragon provides his willing subject, Vladimir, with the energy to strive, and thus to suffer.

Finally, we end with the mind itself, and Estragon's understanding of boredom:

ESTRAGON:	In the meantime nothing happens.
POZZO:	You find it tedious?
ESTRAGON:	Somewhat.
POZZO:	(*to Vladimir*). And you, sir?
VLADIMIR:	I've been better entertained (Beckett, 1956: 38).

Earlier I argued that the utilization of the unrelieved state of boredom was Beckett's unique contribution to the field of ascetic practice. I suggested that Lucky's refusal to 'entertain' (Beckett, 1956: 34) Pozzo was a key aspect of his preparing his willing subject for the further ascetic method of self-castigation, or, in Beckettian terms, the refusal of deadening Habit permits the presentation of painful knowledge in the form of greater self-knowledge. We thus see that the intellect's refusal to 'entertain' is vital to both the creation and exacerbation of boredom. Given this, we may note that in contrast to Lucky's refusal to entertain, Estragon continues to provide, or at least attempts to provide, Vladimir with 'entertainment'. In contrast to Lucky who exacerbates boredom so as to permit a space for self-castigation, Estragon provides self-castigation as entertainment, and thus temporarily alleviates his and Vladimir's boredom:

	They glare at each other angrily.
VLADIMIR:	Ceremonious ape!
ESTRAGON:	Punctilious pig!

...

VLADIMIR: Moron!

ESTRAGON: That's the idea, let's abuse each other.

...

VLADIMIR: Moron!

ESTRAGON: Vermin!

VLADIMIR: Abortion!

ESTRAGON: Morpion!

VLADIMIR: Sewer-rat!

ESTRAGON: Curate!

VLADIMIR: Cretin!

ESTRAGON: (*with finality*). Crritic!

VLADIMIR: Oh!

Unlike the self-castigatory knowledge that Lucky provides to Pozzo – knowledge which has a *revelatory* character – the form of self-castigation witnessed here is that which is undertaken for the sake of distraction. It does not provide Vladimir with the knowledge of suffering, but instead momentarily frees him from suffering by providing a distraction. And we may note that not only is such self-castigation performed with the intention of providing relief, it is also carried out with the intention of 'making up', and not parting:

ESTRAGON: Now let's make it up.

VLADIMIR: Gogo!

ESTRAGON: Didi!

VLADIMIR: Your hand!

ESTRAGON: Take it!

VLADIMIR: Come to my arms!

ESTRAGON: Your arms?

VLADIMIR: My breast!

ESTRAGON: Off we go!

They embrace. They separate. Silence.

VLADIMIR: How time flies when one has fun! (Beckett, 1956: 75-6).

We may also note that the provision of such a distraction merely passes the time, whereas Lucky's refusal to distract Pozzo from suffering ultimately *destroys* time (Beckett, 1956: 86).

There are many other instances where Estragon assists Vladimir in his attempts to distract himself from the pain of boredom (for example see Beckett, 1956: 62-65, 69, 71-72). Often distraction is provided in the form of forced conversation, and contrived debate:

ESTRAGON: That's the idea, let's contradict each other...
That's the idea, let's ask each other questions ...
That wasn't a bad little canter.

VLADIMIR: Yes, but now we'll have to find something else.

ESTRAGON: Let me see (Beckett, 1956: 64).

As Young (2005: 210-11) indicates, for Schopenhauer one of the key features of the experience of boredom – in addition to the perceptual experience of life as being dreary and dead – is that, with existence having now become a burden, we seek to 'kill time' (WWR 1: 313). Out of a sense of desperation, we adopt 'trivial motives', the value of which is 'arbitrarily assumed' (Schopenhauer, 1974b Vol. 1: 331-2).

What we witness, then, is Estragon's failure to comprehend boredom as an opportunity to bring suffering to an end:

> ESTRAGON: Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful! (Beckett, 1956: 41).

In response to this sensation, rather than choosing to exacerbate his and Vladimir's shared sense of boredom, Estragon constantly performs his function as a servant of the will and provides him with a motive for action, however arbitrary, or contrived.

The final means by which Estragon attempts to alleviate the pain of boredom is through the provision of the motive of suicide. It might seem strange to portray suicidal contemplation as a motive for action, however the provision of suicidal contemplation as a last-ditch attempt to provide a motive is of great concern to Beckett. The provision of suicide as an option is portrayed by Beckett as a motive like any other motive: it permits one's willing aspect to strive towards a goal, in this case the goal of one's phenomenal self-destruction (see WWR 1: 399–400). Thus when, in the face of boredom, Estragon repeatedly recommends death by hanging (Beckett, 1956: 17, 53, 93-94) it is a motive that permits Vladimir to strive; it *relieves* the suffering that comes from lacking a motive. We may note that at no point does Lucky provide the motive of suicidal contemplation to his willing subject, Pozzo. Indeed, in Beckett's tragedies only the knowing subject that refuses to provide *any* motives, including the non-provision of suicidal contemplation, then

goes on to break his or her will, or, in other words, places his or her will in such a position that it freely chooses to resign from life (WWR 1: 285, 395; WWR 2: 629).[lvi]

With this discussion in place, I shall now return to the earlier cited quotation from *The World as Will and Representation* regarding the many reasons that one continues to strive despite having gained some understanding of suffering. Vladimir's soliloquy near the end of Act II of *Waiting for Godot* can be read in the light of Schopenhauerian 'ensnarement' (WWR 1: 379):

> Was I sleeping, while the others suffered? Am I sleeping now? Tomorrow, when I wake, or think I do, what shall I say of today? That with Estragon my friend, at this place, until the fall of night, I waited for Godot? That Pozzo passed, with his carrier, and that he spoke to us? Probably. But in all that what truth will there be?... Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave-digger puts on the forceps. We have time to grow old. The air is full of our cries...But habit is a great deadener... At me too someone is looking, of me too someone is saying, he is sleeping, he knows nothing, let him sleep on ... I can't go on!... What have I said? (Beckett, 1956: 90-91).

What does Vladimir now know? Vladimir is on the verge of comprehending universal suffering. Vladimir has become aware that he has been, and indeed may continue to be, insensible to the suffering of others, whose existence as objectifications of the will is a fleeting moment filled with suffering—'the air is full of our cries'. That is, in acknowledging his insensibility to universal suffering, Vladimir has acquired a degree of knowledge about his essential character. Vladimir is also aware that Pozzo and Lucky's coming and going merely occurs in the phenomenal realm, and that his desire for Godot's arrival is nothing more than a temporary goal: 'But in all that what truth would there be?' However, unlike Pozzo, Vladimir is unable to 'go on'. This phrase, 'I can't go on', refers to Vladimir's

own suffering, that is, Vladimir is declaring his inability to go on suffering the pain that accompanies self-knowledge. Vladimir cannot tear himself free from his attachment to life, and freely choose to resign. It is because of this inability to endure in suffering that Vladimir must endure the pain that comes with striving once more. This moment is marked by the arrival of the boy who brings news of Godot, and of hope, in the form of tomorrow (Beckett, 1956: 91). 'Habit is a great deadener', then, because perceiving egoistically stops one from experiencing personally felt suffering, and thus from gaining knowledge of suffering *per se*.

I believe the reason that the willing subject, Vladimir, continues to live in the hope that 'tomorrow everything will be better' (Beckett, 1956: 52), and cannot ultimately suffer enough so as to appreciate ubiquitous suffering, is that his intellect Estragon fails to guide Vladimir along the second path to knowledge of suffering (WWR 1: 393; WWR 2: 638). Estragon lives in hope, whether it is the hope that comes with the ability to buy one's way out of unhappiness, or the hope that going to a new location will make one happy (Beckett, 1956: 81, 92). Belief in a better *elsewhere* is the knowledge that Estragon presents to his will. In short, Vladimir continues to live in hope that suffering can be avoided because his intellect, Estragon, continues to tell him that suffering can be avoided (by acquiring money, going elsewhere, or by ending his life). Estragon has misperceived the cause of suffering. Estragon mistakenly believes that what is longed for is the problem – that waiting for Godot is the cause of suffering – when in fact the problem is longing itself.

This reading provides a challenge to Alain Badiou's understanding of Vladimir's determination to wait for Godot as the refusal to give up on the possibility of the 'Other's' arrival (Badiou, 2003: 73). For Badiou the very ethicality of Beckett's work stems from its openness to the possibility of the 'Other', of living in the hope that the truth will emerge (Badiou, 2003: 22). In contrast to Badiou's reading of Beckettian tragedy, I argue that the truth – in the form of the awareness of oneness and the ubiquity of suffering – can only emerge once one has *lost* hope. That Vladimir continues to believe that Godot's arrival will mark the point when he,

Vladimir, might receive some personal benefit appears not to be a moment of openness to the 'Other', but yet another moment of egoism. For Vladimir the 'Other' is viewed in terms of utility, one who might answers one's prayers, after consulting his or her bank account (Beckett, 1956: 18).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that *Waiting for Godot* is Beckettian theatre of asceticism. I believe that the knowing subject, Lucky, is both an ascetic, and a successful ascetic at that, an intellect who breaks his willing subject by employing what I have referred to as the Beckettian dynamically sublime. As part of this ascetic method, Lucky first denies Pozzo the painlessness of habitual consciousness. Whilst held in this frustrated state, Lucky then provides his knowing subject with the knowledge of his responsibility for the suffering of countless others, or, in other words, knowledge that is a disincentive to further action. In response to this involuntary memory, Pozzo resigns from life; an event signified by Pozzo's loss of sight, and Lucky's inability to speak. The Pozzo-Lucky pseudocouple comes to an end. Lucky is freed from the desires of an individual will (WWR 1: 199). All that is left of the will is the last vestige of the body (WWR 1: 180, 411). In contrast to this, I have argued that the play's other knowing subject, Estragon, is not an ascetic but an intellect that misperceives striving as a solution to his problems rather than the cause of his suffering. The Vladimir-Estragon pseudocouple continues to suffer because Estragon continues to present the 'caricature' (Beckett, 1999: 14) of will-centred, habitual consciousness as 'reality' (Beckett, 1999: 22, 33). Estragon continues to furnish Vladimir with motives, which encourages Vladimir to misperceive suffering as an inessential feature of existence. The next chapter continues this reading of Beckett's tragedies as a sustained engagement with the life-denying aspects of Schopenhauerian thought by exploring the middle period works, *Endgame*, and *Happy Days*.

Chapter 9: Beckettian Ethics – Asceticism, Part Two: *Endgame*, and *Happy Days*

In this chapter I again explore the proposition that Beckett's middle-period tragedies can be understood as 'theatre of asceticism' by once again employing Schopenhauer's understanding of the dynamically sublime as an interpretive framework. It is my contention that the plays *Endgame*, and *Happy Days* are works in which Beckett continues to investigate the effectiveness of a variety of ascetic methods. The first half of this chapter presents a reading of *Endgame*. Here I argue that we witness the intellect's refusal to furnish the will with empirical objects. The second half of this chapter explores Beckett's ongoing utilization of Schopenhauerian thought through a reading of *Happy Days*, where I argue that we witness the intellect's attempts to *entirely* refuse the will by taking a vow of silence.

Endgame

There are many similarities between the ascetic tactics of Lucky and Clov, as indeed Lucky and Clov's respective willing subjects are similarly egocentric. With regards to Pozzo and Hamm, both willing subjects share an inability to comprehend the suffering of others.[lvii] Whilst Pozzo was wholly unable to understand why others were starving, Hamm's understanding of others' suffering is confined to a 'formal', or theoretical understanding, which has not affected his behaviour. Though 'willing to believe they suffer as much as such creatures can suffer', Hamm still 'hesitates to end' (Beckett, 1958: 12), that is, to cease striving.

As a consequence of this insensitivity to the suffering of others, the Beckettian knowing subjects, Lucky and Clov, establish a means of generating personally felt

suffering, that is, they deliberately guide their willing subjects along the second path to knowledge of suffering as something that is essential to willed life (WWR 1: 393). Both knowing subjects seek to deny their respective willing aspect the certainty it needs to be able to act, that is, both intellectual characters starve their willing aspect of *information* about the world. However, whilst the knowing subject, Lucky, denies the possibility of forming a judgement by combining concepts, Clov's method of generating uncertainty differs at a practical level: in an attempt to make Hamm suffer the pain of boredom, Clov refuses to provide Hamm with a representation of an empirical object situated in space and time. Essentially, then, Clov's ascetic method also involves the deprivation of habitual knowledge, though in this case it is the kind of knowledge that one finds in the first class of object in the Schopenhauerian fourfold root (Schopenhauer, 1974a: 75; WWR 1: 11-12).

When Clov invariably responds to Hamm's requests for the provision of information (Beckett, 1958: 48), he does so by providing answers that are essentially without content. In *Endgame*, then, we again observe the importance of the ascetic intellect appearing to perform its role as servant of the will. Significantly, Clov never refuses to provide representations *per se*, rather Clov refuses to provide representations that permit Hamm to act in a particular way. Though Clov refuses to perform his role in a way that would be of benefit to Hamm as the 'will not to suffer', he nonetheless consistently acts as Hamm's 'servant', or at least gives the impression of doing so. Where earlier Lucky had necessarily responded to Pozzo's tugging on the rope around his neck, Clov responds just as promptly to the sound of Hamm's whistle (Beckett: 1958: 13, 15, and 22). As well as responding 'immediately' to the sound of the whistle, Clov also carries out Hamm's orders as long as Hamm wishes him to do so:

> CLOV: I'm going to look at this filth since it's an order (Beckett, 1958: 49).

And earlier:

CLOV: Do this, do that, and I do it. I never refuse. Why?

(Beckett, 1958: 31-32; see also 48).

We may note that this is a particularly important insight on Beckett's part into to both the role of the intellect, and the necessity of 'always' performing that role.[lviii]

That Beckett's work is an attempt to rid the world of life-denying meaning is an influential interpretation of long-standing (Adorno, 1991; Cavell, 2002). Beckett's work has been consistently understood as an attempt to rid the world of nihilistic meaning, meaning which ultimately burdens life, and thus prevents us from knowing, and living life as it is (Adorno, 1991, Deleuze, 1995; Cavell, 2002, Critchley, 1997). Meaning, then, is *the* problem in the work of a number of Beckett's post-Nietzschean interpreters, and this very same concern has been discerned in Beckett's work.

Understood, then, in the light of the post-Nietzschean concern with the attribution of meaning as a case of nihilism, or a 'covering up' of existence, *meaninglessness* is thus purported to be the revelatory message (Adorno, 1991: 243), or goal of Beckettian tragedy (Cavell, 2002: 156).

In contrast to this post-Nietzschean position, which argues the *affirmative* nature of art generally, and Beckettian tragedy specifically, it is my contention that Beckettian meaninglessness is indeed intended to reveal the true nature of the world, but that this is done not with rehabilitative, intent, but rather for *destructive* effect. The intention of Beckettian tragedy, I believe, is to reveal life as an event of suffering (Beckett, 1999: 19). This knowledge is presented by the intellect to the will with the intention of breaking the will, that is, to place the will in a position of

unalleviated suffering from which it freely chooses to resign from life. Therefore Beckett's refusal to ascribe meaning is *not* intended to uncover a life which when freed from the disguise of attributed meaning may then become livable, but to reveal the very fundamental intolerability of 'reality' (Beckett, 1999: 22), which meaning – in the form of habitual knowledge – has up until then made bearable.

Meaninglessness is neither the end, nor goal of Beckettian tragedy, it is a means to an end, a tactic employed by the knowing subject in an attempt to maintain the willing subject in a non-habitual state of suffering. In short, Beckettian meaninglessness may be understood as a means to the end of a permanent will-less existence.

Again, I contend that the tactic of meaninglessness plays an important role in the two-part Beckettian ascetic method, which, as I have consistently argued throughout this thesis, utilizes and develops an important aspect of Schopenhauerian aesthetics, namely the dynamically sublime. By providing a deliberately ambiguous response to the will's demands for a motive, that is, by refusing to provide a *meaningful* motive for action in the form of an empirical object, the intellect, Clov, in effect, holds the will at bay (WWR 1: 202), or denies the individual will the numbing experience of habitual consciousness. When held in this 'perilous zone' (Beckett, 1999: 18-19) between acts of habitual perception, the individual will, Hamm, experiences the 'suffering of being' in two distinct ways. First, Hamm suffers the pain of lacking an object towards which he may expend his energy, or, in other words, the will experiences the effects of unalleviated 'boredom' (WWR 1: 164, 312, 364. Following this, he suffers from the knowledge (WWR 1: 400) he receives instead of habitual consciousness, namely knowledge about the ubiquitous nature of suffering (WWR 1: 315, 397). Denied painless habitual consciousness, the individual will is presented with an 'involuntary memory' of an event – 'the total past sensation, not its echo nor its copy, but the sensation itself, annihilating every spatial and temporal restriction' (Beckett, 1999: 72-3) – and is revealed to itself either as a being that has suffered, or a being that has caused others to suffer. In Hamm's case, it experiences both.[lix] This awareness

of past suffering is itself a cause of suffering. Ultimately such suffering is brought to mind for the purpose of placing the individual will in a position of suffering from which it freely chooses to resign from life. Thus in Beckettian tragedy, involuntary memory may be understood as a radical disincentive to further action (Zöller, 1999: 38).

Clov's, unique ascetic method of generating uncertainty – through the consistent presentation of a series of representations that are ambiguous because they lack an empirical object situated in space and time – can be seen in a number of pertinent passages in *Endgame*.[lx] The first part of Clov's two-part ascetic method for *breaking* (WWR 1: 392) his willing subject is executed by employing the negative freedom (Shapshay, 2012b: 25) of holding the will at bay (WWR 1: 202) by refusing to perform the intellect's normal, servile, function of generating empirical objects, and situating events in space and time:

HAMM: ... What time is it?

CLOV: The same as usual.

HAMM: (*anguished.*) What's happening, what's happening?

CLOV: Something is taking its course.

HAMM: The waves, how are the waves?

CLOV: The waves? (*He turns his telescope on the waves.*) Lead.

HAMM: And the sun?

CLOV: (*looking.*) Zero.

HAMM: But it should be sinking. Look again.

CLOV: (*looking.*) Damn the sun.

HAMM: Is it night already then?

CLOV: (*looking.*) No.

HAMM: Then what is it?

CLOV: (*looking.*) Grey. (*Lowering the telescope, turning towards Hamm, louder.*) Grey! (*Pause. Still louder.*) GRREY!

Pause. He gets down, approaches Hamm from behind, whispers in his ear.

HAMM: (*starting.*) Grey! Did I hear you say grey?

CLOV: Light black. From pole to pole (Beckett, 1958: 13, 17, 26).

In the last of these deliberately inhibiting exchanges, Clov not only prevents the will from acting, and thus causes the will to suffer by allowing the pressure of willing to build, but in addition to providing an ambiguous response to the demand for information, he also makes an already ambiguous response more ambiguous still – if such a thing is possible – by making the very signifier of uncertainty, the colour 'grey', even more uncertain by describing it, oxymoronically (see Ricks, 1993: 153-203), as *light black.* Equally, Clov could have used the term *dark white* in his attempts to make an already vague representation even less clear, and to leave Hamm in a state of 'acute frustration' (Young, 2005: 212).

In his use of the term 'grey' to describe the world experienced by the bored person, Beckett appears to draw upon Schopenhauer's understanding of boredom, in this instance the *perceptual* affect of boredom, wherein, if the will is deprived of a motive, all is experienced as 'colourless', 'dreary' and 'dead' (WWR 1: 314; Young, 1987: 141:

> Nothing attracts our attention, nothing 'interests' us, everything is indifferent, of equal – which is to say of no – value (Young, 2005: 210).

Similarly, where the Schopenhauerian state of boredom is 'colourless', 'dreary', and 'dead', within the Beckettian bored mind all is 'grey', 'not much fun', and 'corpsed' (Beckett, 1958: 26, 17, 25). Thus it is that when asked by Hamm to describe what he sees, Clov responds to this request by describing the world as the person experiencing boredom views it: as barren (Schopenhauer, 1974b Vol. 2: 287), 'lifeless' (WWR 1: 164), 'empty' (WWR 1: 312), and 'desolate' (WWR 1: 364). That is, Clov presents a description of the mind minus a motive, rather than a motive in the mind.

There are numerous examples in *Endgame* of Clov's deliberate presentation of representations that lack an empirical object, and therefore deny the willing subject knowledge of the world that permits action:

CLOV: Your dogs are here.

He hands the dog to Hamm who feels it, fondles it.

HAMM: He's white, isn't he?

CLOV: Nearly.

HAMM: What do you mean, nearly? Is he white or isn't he?

CLOV: He isn't.

HAMM: Is it light?

CLOV: It isn't dark.

HAMM: Am I very white? (*Pause. Angrily.*) I'm asking you am I very white?

CLOV: Not more so than usual (Beckett, 1958: 30, 42).

In this series of obscure responses, Clov appears to perform his role as 'servant of the will' (WWR 2: 216), that is, Clov invariably presents a picture of the world at the behest of the willing subject. However, at no point does Clov provide a clear, usable motive for action. Whilst appearing to perform his servile role, Clov inflicts upon the will the type of suffering that is generated by uncertainty, namely the pain of boredom: the mind minus a motive, experiencing the full force of willing (WWR 1: 364). Beckett has the willing subject, Hamm, describe the effect that this ascetic method ('Character – Motive (Representation) = Inaction') is having upon him:

Hamm: This is deadly (Beckett, 1958: 25).

One may compare Hamm's awareness of the destructive nature of Clov's behaviour to Pozzo's earlier declaration that Lucky's actions were 'killing' him (Beckett, 1956: 34).

In addition to Clov's ascetic method of refusing to provide representations in the form of empirical objects, Clov also systematically removes existing empirical objects from the world. Badiou understands this process – the 'subtraction of ornaments', and the 'loss of inessential attributes' – as an important part of clearing the ground, a means of revealing a certain 'essence', which Badiou refers to as 'generic humanity' (Badiou, 2003: 3). Badiou understands this process, then, as one undertaken in preparation for the arrival of the truth (Badiou, 2003: 22). For Badiou the truth is the arrival of the 'Other', which signals a move away from solipsism. For Badiou the truth is life-affirming 'Event'. Once again, I believe Badiou's assertion of the arrival of the 'Other' as a life-affirming possibility tends to

ignore the *nature* of the 'Other' that arrives in Beckettian tragedy through the practice of the 'subtraction of ornaments'. When he or she arrives, the Beckettian 'Other' comes in the form of the suffering 'Other'. The 'truth' is that one has suffered, or caused others to suffer. The truth is unbearable. Thus Beckett describes habitual consciousness as a 'pain-killer' (Beckett, 1958: 14, 16-17, 23, 28, 34). The thing that allows us to go on is *not* knowing the truth that all is 'one', and that suffering is therefore ubiquitous.

By removing empirical objects from the world – bicycle wheels, pap, nature, tides, rugs, blankets, coffins (Beckett, 1958: 15, 16, 41, 44, 49) – that is, by removing the 'inessential attributes' (Badiou, 2003: 3) – Clov is essentially depriving his will of *relief*, the relief of a phenomenal motive, or, in Beckettian terms, a 'pain-killer', which otherwise prevents one from acknowledging the suffering 'Other':

HAMM: Is it not time for my pain-killer?

CLOV: No.

HAMM: This is slow work. (*Pause.*) Is it not time for my pain-killer?

CLOV: No.

HAMM: Give me my pain-killer.

CLOV: It's too soon.

HAMM: Is it not time for my pain-killer?

CLOV: (*violently.*) No!

HAMM: Is it not time for my pain-killer?

CLOV: No! (Beckett, 1958: 14, 16-17, 23, 28, 34).

A 'pain-killer' may be understood as something that permits the 'will not to suffer' to avoid suffering. It is akin to a Schopenhauerian 'motive'. A motive permits the will to strive, and thus to avoid the suffering that comes with not striving, namely the pain of Schopenhauerian 'boredom'. A pain-killer, or motive, permits the will to perceive the world 'habitually', that is, as a thing of mere utility for the individual will; such knowledge positions the individual will as the centre of the world, where its individual needs are of paramount concern (Beckett, 1958: 23-24; cf. WWR 1: 177). Finally, a pain-killer is a limited version of the world, that both prevents the pain of boredom, and the pain of the more comprehensive knowledge that is potentially destructive to the idea one has of oneself.

Thus when deprived of a motive for action, the willing subject is held in the 'perilous zone' (Beckett, 1999: 18-19), of habit-free consciousness where the individual is permitted to experience reality, that is, the ubiquitous nature of suffering:

HAMM: Is it not time for my pain-killer?

CLOV: Yes.

HAMM: Ah! At last! Give it to me! Quick!

Pause.

CLOV: There's no more pain-killer... You'll never get anymore pain-killer (46).

Pause.

HAMM: But the little round box. It was full!

CLOV: Yes. But now it's empty (Beckett, 1958: 46).

Here Beckett captures the utility of the mind within the skull with the phrase 'little round box', and in turn reveals the mind of the ascetic as something that lacks content. In Beckettian asceticism, the only true pain-killer is the non-provision of pain-killer (cf. WWR 1: 380). To deprive the will of the comfort of habitual consciousness, the intellect must refuse to furnish the will with the objects of habitual consciousness. Only then might suffering come to an end, as opposed to merely not being *felt.*

This completes my presentation of the first part of the two-stage Beckettian method of ascetic practice that one finds in *Endgame*: the presentation of ambiguous representations which lack an empirical object for the purpose of causing the willing subject to suffer the pain of non-habitual consciousness. What we begin to see, then, is that in the middle period tragedies, Beckett appears to be exploring different methods of representational deprivation. In *Waiting for Godot* we observed the intellect's refusal to provide the will with a judgement by presenting concepts that preclude the development of an argument. In *Endgame* we witness the intellect's refusal to present the will with representations in the form of empirical objects. In both cases the intellect's method of fighting the 'war' against the willing subject is based upon refusing to do what the intellect normally does, that is, to provide the will with a picture of the world. The next section explores the *purpose* of the intellect's deliberate refusal of pain-free, habitual consciousness, and the generation of the suffering experienced in the state of boredom, namely to permit the presentation of knowledge that is normally excluded by the function of 'Habit' (Beckett, 1999: 18-19), the *deeper* knowledge of aesthetic consciousness (Beckett, 1999: 79): knowledge of ubiquitous suffering. This knowledge comes in the form of an *involuntary memory* (Beckett, 1999: 72-3). What *deeper* knowledge of his character does the intellect Clov present to Hamm as a disincentive to further striving?

Voluntary and Involuntary Memory

In all three of Beckett's ascetic tragedies, the 'war' between the knowing and willing subjects is fought on the *battleground of memory*. On one side of the war the willing subject seeks to understand the world through the memory of Habit, voluntary memory: the, recollection of a limited, useful, version of events generated at the time for the benefit of the will not to suffer (Beckett, 1999: 32-33). This is memory that presents the willing subject to itself in a favourable light:

> HAMM: I love the old questions. (*With fervour.*) Ah the old questions, the old answers, there's nothing like them! (Beckett, 1958: 29)

On the other side of this war, the intellect attempts to present the willing subject with the knowledge of either the suffering caused, or the suffering felt, or both forms of suffering. Thus whilst denying the will the painlessness of habitual consciousness, the intellect *also* seeks to present the will with the painful knowledge of the past, namely that presented in the form of an involuntary memory (Beckett, 1999: 72-3), which I have earlier presented as *a more comprehensive version* of past events, a version of one's personal history that includes painful material otherwise omitted by voluntary memory (WWR 2: 208).

To understand the workings of voluntary memory in *Endgame* we need to look closely at Hamm's 'chronicle' (Beckett, 1958: 40), the *censored* version of his life and his character:

HAMM: Enough of that, it's story time, where was I? The man came crawling towards me, on his belly. Pale, wonderfully pale and thin, he seemed on the point of ... No, I've done that bit... Well, what is it *you* want? ... It's my little one, he said ... My little boy... Well to make it short it finally transpired that what he wanted from me was ... bread for his brat ... Well to make it short I finally offered to take him into my service. He had touched a chord ... In the end he asked me would I consent to take in the child ... (Beckett, 1958: 35-7).

In his chronicle, Hamm presents himself to himself as a good man, one who saves the lives of the vulnerable. Much like Pozzo before him, Hamm understands his character as that of a man who is generous, and whose actions are benevolent, despite evidence to the contrary (Beckett, 1958: 15).[lxi]

I shall now compare this flattering, self-aggrandizing, version of the self and one's past actions to the knowledge presented to the will through involuntary memory (Beckett, 1999: 72-3), which 'recalls the past self as well as the full extent of the self's experience; both not disfigured by the will-controlled mechanisms of everyday survival and both therefore true' (Pothast, 2008: 125-126). Having opened up a 'perilous zone' by depriving the willing subject of a motive, the intellect then generates further suffering by presenting painful knowledge in the form of *uncensored* recollections. With regard to the theoretical framework I have established for interpreting Beckettian tragedy, I assert that the following occurs: by holding the will at bay, by refusing to provide the will with a phenomenal motive, the intellect has prepared the will for the ascetic method of self-castigation (WWR 1: 382), whereby the individual verbally denounces himself or herself as a form of penance. By accusing oneself of past misdeeds, the intellect attempts to disabuse the will of self-misperception, which in Hamm's case is that of selflessly coming to the aid of those in need.

After a protracted battle of motive demand and motive refusal, whereby Hamm has been denied not merely self-centered knowledge of the world but the possibility of such knowledge ever being presented again – 'There's no more pain-killer' (1958: 46) – that is, when the suffering of 'boredom' is at its zenith, Clov then presents to Hamm a disincentive for action (Zöller, 1999: 38), namely that he allowed his neighbour, old Mother Pegg, to die of 'darkness' (Beckett, 1958: 48). There is a suggestion here that Hamm has allowed 'old' Mother Pegg to die because she had grown 'old', and was therefore no longer of any use to him. Earlier Hamm had described Mother Pegg as 'a great one for the men!' (Beckett, 1958: 31). Having grown 'old', Mother Pegg no longer possessed sexual utility, and because of this was allowed to die.[lxii]

The Beckettian two-part ascetic method of first denying the will a motive, which is then followed by the presentation of a disincentive for action, is performed with the intention of presenting to the will a devastating understanding of its intelligible character (WWR 1: 289). Through the presentation of the involuntary memory of Hamm's utter indifference to an individual life – a representation of Hamm's intelligible character – the knowing subject, Clov, is able to furnish Hamm with an understanding of his true, callous, nature. Here the Beckettian intellect reveals to the individual will its intelligible character by ensuring that incidents of empirical character previously deemed by the will to be unfavourable to the will's positive self-perception (Beckett, 1999: 18-19; WWR 2: 208), and therefore not previously brought before the will because of the pain they would cause, are made known to the will. In this way the individual will acquires character, which may be understood as 'self-knowledge' (WWR 1: 303). In short, the Beckettian intellect uses self-knowledge – painful 'involuntary' memories (Beckett, 1999: 72-3) – to break the individual will.

In this process, the willing subject, Hamm, transitions from the experience of personally felt suffering – that of boredom, and the knowledge of having not been cared for as a child (Beckett, 1958: 35, 38) – to an awareness of the suffering of

other individuals (old Mother Pegg), and finally to an understanding of suffering *per se*:

HAMM: Before you go say... say something ... a few words to ponder ... in my heart ... A few words ... from your heart.

CLOV: (*fixed gaze, tonelessly, towards auditorium*). They said to me, That's love, yes yes, not a doubt, now you see how—

HAMM: Articulate!

CLOV: (*as before*). How easy it is. They said to me, That's friendship, yes yes, no question, you've found it. They said to me, Here's the place, stop, raise your head and look at all that beauty. That order! They said to me, Come now, you're not a brute beast, think upon these things and you'll see how all becomes clear. And simple! They said to me, What skilled attention they get, all these dying of their wounds (Beckett, 1958: 50-51).

Once again, as was the case in *Waiting for Godot*, when in *Endgame* the 'Other' is truly acknowledged, that 'Other' arrives in the form of the suffering 'Other'—those dying of their wounds. In Hamm's case the suffering 'Other' is his neglected childhood self (1958: 35, 38), and the neighbour who died of 'darkness' because of his selfishness. Again, as was also the case in *Waiting for Godot*, this awareness of the 'Other' does not result in an affirmation of existence, but rather a withdrawal from the life of striving, which is now understood as the cause of suffering.[lxiii]

The End of *Endgame*: Beckett's Depiction of Successful Ascetic Practice

Much has already been written on the subject of what happens, or fails to happen, at the end of a number of Beckett's works. Of all of Beckett's tragedies, the play *Endgame* has borne the closest philosophical analysis regarding whether or not the goals of silence, and meaninglessness can ever be attained. I have already discussed the existing philosophical framework for comprehending Beckett's work in other parts of this thesis. Suffice it to say that Beckett's philosophical interpreters have argued that silence is either not a goal that can be reached (Adorno, 1991; Nussbaum, 1990), or not a goal at all (Critchley, 1997), or a goal that can be reached, by confronting and overcoming the nihilism of language for the purpose of affirming life (Deleuze, 1995).

Through a determination to portray Beckettian tragedy as a life-affirming medium, a number of Beckett's interpreters have argued that at the end of *Endgame* all is essentially as it was at the start of the play. It is because of this sense of having come full circle that one may argue that the whole routine could, conceivably, start all over again.[lxiv] This reading dismisses the claim that the state of nothingness has been attained at the end of the play, and thus that 'nihilism' has been shown to fail once more (see, for example, Weller, 2005: 23; 2006: 193; 2009: 39; Boxall (2010: 31). The early interpretive work of Adorno is particularly influential in this regard. In addition to observing that at the end of *Endgame* we do not see Clov exit, Adorno also states that:

> This is an allegory whose intention has fizzled out. Aside from the differences which may be decisive but may also be completely irrelevant, it is identical with the beginning. No spectator, and no philosopher, would be capable of saying for sure whether or not the play is starting all over again (Adorno, 1991: 269).

Adorno's dismissiveness of the details of the play ties into his overall contention that the content of the work has been made irrelevant by Beckett's refusal of ontological meaning, which also renders the form and content meaningless (Adorno, 1991: 242) (see Chapter 2, Literature Review). What, then, are the 'irrelevant' differences that we see at the end of the play? One of the characters, Nell, has 'died' (Beckett, 1958: 22). Clov changes his attire to one who is 'dressed for the road' (Beckett, 1958: 51). Hamm, who is first observed covered with a sheet, is left uncovered at the end of the play (Beckett, 1958: 11, 51). And, finally, Hamm discards his ability to summon Clov, by throwing away his whistle (Beckett, 1958: 52). What Adorno's argument ultimately suggests is that there is another unseen second Act where the characters change their attire, regain their possessions, and return to life. That is, Adorno's argument is predicated on something that is not in the text. Adorno's claims are not supported by the content of the play, and nor are they supported by the *form* of the play.[lxv]

In contrast to these arguments, I contend that in the play *Endgame*, the knowing subject, Clov, achieves the goal of silence, which signifies the willing subject's resignation from the life of striving. That the willing subject, Hamm, now understands his true nature, and freely chooses to resign based upon this knowledge, is revealed in the following passage:

> HAMM: It's the end, Clov, we've come to the end. I don't need you any more (Beckett, 1958: 50).

Broken by the knowledge of his true nature, his intelligible character – that Hamm is capable of allowing others to die if they no longer have anything to offer him – Hamm no longer wishes to continue. This state-of-affairs is borne out by the way that Hamm refuses the opportunity to recount his 'chronicle' again. When presented with the knowledge that there is a small boy situated outside the bunker

– most likely the memory of Clov's arrival as a child (see Little, 1978: 47), Hamm evinces his disinclination to reminisce (Beckett, 1958: 49-50).

With Hamm's resignation, also comes the end of the world as representation: 'No will: no representation, no world' (WWR 1: 411). The 'light', which the will has kindled for itself in the form of the world as representation (WWR 1: 150) is extinguished with the will's resignation or, as Clov describes this process, 'the earth is extinguished' (Beckett, 1958: 51). With the dissolution of the knowing subject, the willing subject, Hamm, also experiences a loss of one of the intellect's *a priori* capabilities, sequentially situating empirical objects in time:

> HAMM: time was never and time is over (Beckett, 1958: 52).

Beckett therefore portrays Clov's ascetic practice – that of providing representations that lack an empirical object, prior to the presentation of an involuntary memory that acts as a disincentive for action – as a successful means of breaking the will, or placing the will in a position of suffering from which it freely chooses to resign from life. That Clov has been successful in his efforts to 'break' Pozzo is again portrayed in two ways: through Hamm's loss of sight, and through Clov's lack of response. Once again, it is through the *combination* of the will's blindness and the intellect's lack of response that Beckett signifies the will's breaking. As Beckett cannot show 'nothing' as an event that has occurred, he must again depict nothingness as an absence of certain features (WWR 1: 409): Clov, a servant who always responds when put into motion by the will (Beckett, 1958: 31-32, 48, 49), now fails to respond:

> HAMM: One more thing. (*Clov halts.*) A last favour. (*Exit Clov.*) Cover me with the sheet. (*Long pause.*) No? Good (Beckett, 1958: 51).

Instead, Clov now stands by the door, 'impassive and motionless' (52).[lxvi]

Hamm's resignation, conceived as such, may again be understood in relation to an important passage from the Fourth Book of *The World as Will and Representation* on the subject of the will's resignation (WWR 1: 392-3). To assist in the comprehension of my argument, I shall interleave Schopenhauer's description of the process of resignation with several key moments from *Endgame*:

> We then see the man suddenly retire into himself,

> HAMM: It's the end, Clov, we've come to the end. I don't need you any more (Beckett, 1958: 50).

> after he is brought to the verge of despair

> HAMM: (*anguished*). What's happening, what's happening? (Beckett, 1958: 17).

> through all the stages of increasing affliction with the most violent resistance:

> HAMM: All those I might have helped... Helped! ... Saved! ... The place was crawling with them ... Get out of here and love one another! Lick your neighbour as yourself. ... When it wasn't bread they wanted it was crumpets... Out of my sight and back to your petting parties! (Beckett, 1958: 44).

We see him know himself

CLOV: (*harshly.*) When old Mother Pegg asked you for oil for her lamp and you told her to get out to hell, you knew what was happening then, no? (*Pause.*) You know what she died of, Mother Pegg? Of darkness.

HAMM: (*feebly.*) I hadn't any.

CLOV: (*as before.*) Yes, you had (Becket, 1958: 48).

and the world,

CLOV: what skilled attention they get all these dying of their wounds (Beckett, 1958: 50-51).

change his whole nature, rise above himself and above all suffering, as if purified and sanctified by it, in inviolable peace, bliss, and sublimity, willingly renounce everything he formally desired with the greatest vehemence,

HAMM: Good... Discard. (*He throws away the gaff, makes to throw away the dog, thinks better of it.*) Take it easy... ... Well, there we are, there I am, that's enough... Discard. (*He throws away the dog. He tears the whistle from his neck*) (Beckett, 1958: 52).

and gladly welcome death. It is the gleam of silver that suddenly appears from the purifying flame of suffering, the gleam of the denial of the will-to-life, of salvation. Occasionally we see even those who were very wicked purified to this degree by the deepest grief and sorrow; they have become different and are completely converted...

HAMM: Good... Since that's the way we're playing it... let's play it that way ... and speak no more about it ... speak no more (Beckett, 1958: 52-3).

In his *Berlin Diary*, which he kept during the self-directed production of *Endgame*, Beckett describes this process in the following way: 'The notion is that when one has given the tyrant his full account of suffering, he lets the victim go. Only when one has given life its full accounting can one leave it' (Gontarski, 1992: 69).

Because the intellect-servant, Clov, has presented Hamm with the 'full account' of life, knowledge of suffering *per se,* which breaks his tyrannical master, Clov is then freed from the service of the individual will (WWR 1: 199). All that remains of Hamm at the end of *Endgame* is the last vestige of the will, the body (WWR 1: 180, 411).

Happy Days: The purifying flame of suffering

I conclude this textual analysis of Beckettian asceticism with a reading of the two Act play, *Happy Days*, a play that may be understood as the willing subject's ability, as the primary aspect of the self, to deny its own suffering. In Winnie's case the

knowledge of suffering, which she as the 'will not to suffer' (Beckett, 1999: 43) seeks to deny, is the knowledge of her own childhood sexual abuse at the hands of a family friend (Weller, 2006: 185). It is this knowledge of personally felt suffering which she evades through a regimen of habitual behaviour (Beckett, 1999: 18-19):

> Habit generates the mind-numbing ennui we use to anesthetize whatever is painful or threatening; by invoking it we live at a re-move from whatever is authentic in our existence (Rabinovitz, 1995: 217).

It has been noted that *Happy Days* is a play about warring opposites (Weller, 2005: 151). I have argued that the basis to this war is the intellect's attempts to refuse to provide a motive for action to its willing subject. On one side of this 'war', then, we have the intellect, Willie, who wishes to deny his willing subject the painlessness of habitual consciousness (Beckett, 1999: 90), namely consciousness of the world which benefits the individual 'will not to suffer' in its goal to avoid the pain of uncensored life. On the other side of this war, stands Winnie, a subject of willing that wishes to remain in a state of painless, habitual, consciousness, and therefore constantly demands the provision of motives, or *distractions,* from the intellect.

Willie's ultimate tactic in *Happy Days* is to deny Winnie recourse to new information about the world, and to the lifelong series of distractions that Winnie has gathered together in a large shopping bag (cf. Badiou, 2003: 3). Winnie's tactic to prevent the comprehension of personally felt suffering (WWR 1: 397) is to push Willie to provide her with new *trifling* (Beckett, 1961: 6) information, and to draw upon the contents of 'the bag', which she utilizes in her attempts to occupy her consciousness:

> WINNIE: There is of course the bag... The bag... Could I enumerate its contents? ... No...Could I, if some kind person were to come along and ask, What all have you

> got in that big black bag, Winnie? give an exhaustive answer? ... No... The depths in particular, who knows what treasures... What comforts... Yes, there is the bag (Beckett, 1961: 14).

In this sense, *Happy Days* is typical of Beckettian theatre of asceticism, in that ascetic practice is presented as a series of skirmishes between the intellect and the will to deny and to demand the provision of information. However, *Happy Days* stands alone in Beckett's theatre of asceticism as a tragedy in which, unlike its predecessors, *Waiting for Godot*, and *Endgame*, 'nothing' fails to happen. In the preceding readings of *Godot* and *Endgame* I described both the successful methods of ascetic practice, and the way that Beckett represents their success. This reading of *Happy Days* is an attempt to understand why it is that the intellect, Willie, is ultimately *unsuccessful* in his attempts to break his willing subject, Winnie, with the knowledge of her own suffering (Beckett, 1961: 31). For unlike Lucky, Clov, and Nell, Willie is an ascetic who fails to endure in suffering, and thus fails to break the will.

Before discussing the ascetic methods that set Willie apart from his Beckettian ascetic predecessors, I shall first discuss the 'traditional' methods of asceticism that mark Willie as an ascetic in Schopenhauerian terms: the ascetic methods of self-mortification, celibacy, and fasting.

Self-mortification, or self-torture (WWR 1: 382), is the deliberate self-infliction of physical harm. 'Embedded up to above her waist' in the ground, Winnie is held firmly in place whilst being exposed to the full force of the sun; unable to move, she is unable to avoid the effects of the 'blazing light', the 'blaze of hellish light' (Beckett, 1961: 1, 3). Here we witness one of the more literal Beckettian deployments of Schopenhauerian ascetic imagery, where the willing subject is exposed to the 'purifying flame of suffering' (WWR 1: 393). Beckett's work also draws our attention to a wide array of ascetic methods that Schopenhauer lists in

The World as Will and Representation, Vol. 1. This list includes aspects which appear pertinent to Willie's ascetic practice namely 'the forsaking of every dwelling-place ... deep unbroken solitude spent in silent contemplation with voluntary penance and terrible slow self-torture ... being buried alive' (WWR 1: 388).

Winnie's 'being buried alive' also serves to deny the will the means to express its central characteristic, namely its sexual aspect (WWR 2: Chapter 44; O'Hara, 1981: 255-6, 260). Thus Winnie's burial is an act of enforced celibacy on Willie's part (WWR 1: 380). By Act II of the play, Winnie is buried in the earth up to her neck. This ensures both celibacy and Winnie's inability to make herself attractive to Willie (Beckett, 1961: 30).

Willie's demarcation as a practicing ascetic can also be discerned in the way that he provides Winnie with the ability to continue to inflict suffering upon him and thus at the same time herself. One example of this is the way Willie returns the parasol that Winnie has used to beat him about the head in her attempts to rouse him:

> WINNIE: Hoo-oo! [*Pause.*] Willie! [*Pause.*] Wonderful gift. [*She strikes down at him with the beak of parasol.*] Wish I had it. [*She strikes again. The parasol slips from her grasp and falls behind the mound. It is immediately restored to her by* WILLIE's *invisible hand*] (Beckett, 1961: 4).

As a practicing ascetic, Willie takes every opportunity to experience suffering:

> ... every injury, every ignominy, every outrage. He gladly accepts them as the opportunity for giving himself the certainty that he no longer affirms

> the will... He therefore endures such ignominy and suffering with inexhaustible patience and gentleness, returns good for all evil... and allows the fire of anger to rise again within him as little as he does the fire of desires (WWR 1: 382).

That Willie is manifesting the behaviour of an ascetic is additionally confirmed by the way Winnie experiences his behaviour:

> WINNIE: Poor Willie... running out... ah well... can't be helped... just one of those old things... just can't be cured... cannot be cured...
>
> ...
>
> Poor Willie ... no zest... for anything... no interest... in life... poor dear Willie... sleep for ever...
>
> ...
>
> *[Brings out almost empty bottle of red medicine, turns back front, looks for spectacles, puts them on, reads label.]* Loss of spirits... lack of keenness... want of appetite... (Beckett, 1961: 2, 4).

With Willie's reluctance to perform his role as 'servant of the will' (WWR 2: 216), Winnie is forced to rely upon a limited array of existing motives, which she uses to distract herself.

These ascetic methods – self-mortification, celibacy, and fasting – are the 'traditional' ascetic methods that Willie employs in his attempts to break the will. In addition to these methods, Willie also employs a number of other unconventional methods, namely those of *disgust* and *silence*.

Disgust

In her essay on Beckett, Martha Nussbaum (1990) presents a reading of Beckett's work as a Christian narrative, a religious understanding, where the body, in typically Christian fashion is viewed with disgust. In presenting this view, Nussbaum compares Beckett's writing to fellow anti-religious, 'therapeutic' authors Lucretius and Nietzsche (Nussbaum, 1990: 306-9). But unlike, Lucretius and Nietzsche, Nussbaum holds Beckett's pessimism to be such that it closes the door on the possibility of 'restoration' (Nussbaum, 1990: 307-8). Beckett is simply too disgusted with life to attempt a revaluation. It is Beckett's despair at the impurity of human life, and disgust of the body in particular that explains some of his character's desire for escape. This escape is represented as silence, which will bring 'freedom' from the filth of existence (Nussbaum, 1990: 311).

This section builds upon Nussbaum's insight into the matter of Beckettian disgust, namely that the feeling of disgust in response to the 'impurity' of life, results in the desire to escape from life. However, unlike Nussbaum's reading which understands Beckettian disgust as an evaluation of existence, my reading of disgust as a feeling that is warranted, yet presently absent, and therefore must be deliberately generated, understands disgust as an ascetic tactic: the knowing subject attempts to promote feelings of disgust within the willing subject, feelings which are not presently acknowledged. Thus whereas Nussbaum understands Beckett's disgust with life as the cause of his attempts to end the storytelling life (Nussbaum, 1990: 287-8), I understand Beckettian disgust as part of an attempt to end the storytelling life. The will must be made to feel disgust by being disgusted.

One of the presently overlooked aspects of *Happy Days* is the often repulsive behaviour that Willie displays in Winnie's company. Whilst I have used the word

disgust, which refers to the emotion that I believe Willie wishes to elicit in Winnie, one may, however, also understand Willie's behaviour as an attempt to *repel* his willing subject, and to have her leave him alone:

WINNIE: [WILLIE's *hand reappears, takes off hat, disappears with hat...Hand reappears, takes handkerchief from skull, disappears with handkerchief*...WILLIE blows *his nose loud and long, head and hands invisible. She turns to look at him. Pause. Head reappears. Pause. Hand reappears with handkerchief, spreads it on skull, disappears. Pause. Hand reappears with boater, settles it on head, rakish angle, disappears. Pause.]* Would I had let you sleep on (Beckett, 1961: 7-8).

And later, whilst Winnie is looking his way, Willie picks his nose and eats the contents:

WINNIE: Oh really! ... Have you no handkerchief, darling? ... Have you no delicacy? ... Oh, Willie, you're not eating it! Spit it out, dear, spit it out! (Beckett, 1961: 19).

There are a number of other examples of similarly repugnant behaviour. In an early scene in Act I, Willie admires a pornographic postcard, which Winnie asks to see:

WINNIE: Heavens what are they up to?... No but this is just genuine pure filth...Make any nice-minded

person want to vomit!... What does that creature in the background think he's doing? ... Oh no really! [*She ... takes the edge of the card between right forefinger and thumb, averts head, takes nose between left forefinger and thumb.*] Pah!... Take it away! (Beckett, 1961: 7)

Clearly, the purpose of showing the pornographic photograph to Winnie is not to arouse her in any way, but rather to repulse her. The act of showing Winnie the postcard may be understood as the deliberate presentation of a motive that acts as a disincentive (Zöller, 1999: 38) for further action.

The overall intention of Willie's behaviour is two-fold: first, Willie, as mentioned, wishes to no longer be the object of Winnie's incessant 'affection'. Thus Willie seeks to make himself an object that repels rather than attracts. Second, Willie wishes to disabuse Winnie of her romantic views of sex. By showing Winnie the pornographic postcard, Willie wishes to undermine Winnie's romanticised understanding of the past. In short, Willie's actions may be understood as asceticism, described by Schopenhauer as 'the deliberate search for the unpleasant and the repulsive' (WWR 2: 607) with the intention of having Winnie no longer equate 'love' with romance, but rather 'sex' with 'disgust'. Willie's ultimate intention is to disabuse Winnie of the idea that all of her sexual experiences have been romantic in nature.

This is an important tactic in Willie's attempts to provide Winnie with the knowledge of her own suffering, that is, to have her no longer *misremember* the past. Presently, Winnie remembers her childhood with great fondness:

WILLIE: [reading from a newspaper] His Grace and Most Reverend Father in God Dr Carolus Hunter dead in tub.

[*Pause.*]

WINNIE: [*Gazing front, hat in hand, tone of fervent reminiscence.*] Charlie Hunter! ... I close my eyes ... and am sitting on his knees again, in the back yard at Borough Green, under the horse beech... Oh the happy memories! (Beckett, 1961: 5).

As things presently stand, Winnie is able to both *nostalgise* the past, and to conflate early sexualisation with later romance. Almost immediately after Willie has provoked Winnie with the name of her abuser, Charlie Hunter, Winnie then proceeds to recall later social events – voluntary memories 'relied on to reproduce for [her] gratified inspection those impressions of the past that were consciously and intelligently formed' (Beckett, 1999: 32-33):

WINNIE: My first ball! ... My second ball! ... My first kiss! (Beckett, 1961: 5).

Later, I discuss the reason that Winnie is able to successfully defend herself against the destructive knowledge of actual events. However, I now turn to the second ascetic method that Willie consistently attempts throughout Act I of *Happy Days*, maintaining his *silence*.

Whilst Willie's intention, much like Lucky and Clov, is to cause suffering through irresolution, Willie's approach differs from the method employed by Lucky and Clov. Unlike his fellow ascetics who either provide motives that lack an empirical object – 'Grey... Grey. GRREY!' (Beckett, 1958: 26) – or motives in the form of concepts, the incomplete nature of which precludes a judgement from being formed – 'On the other hand... but not so fast...' (Beckett, 1956: 42-3) – and thus fail to provide a *clear* motive for action, Willie's ascetic method incorporates an attempt on his part to refuse to respond *at all*. In Willie's case, not only is the goal of his

ascetic practice 'silence', but the refusal to respond is also a tactic. Willie employs silence as a weapon against the will.

In the first excerpt, in which Willie attempts to remain silent, Winnie wishes to know the correct way of referring to one's hair:

> WINNIE: Them? [*Pause.*] Or it? [*Pause.*] Brush and comb it? [*Pause.*] Sounds improper somehow. [*Pause. Turning a little towards* WILLIE.] What would you say, Willie, speaking of your hair, them or it? [*Pause.*] The hair on your head I mean. [*Pause. Turning a little further.*] The hair on your head, Willie, what would you say speaking of the hair on your head, them or it? [*Long pause.*]
>
> WILLIE: It.
>
> WINNIE: [*Turning back front, joyful.*] Oh you are going to talk to me today, this is going to be a happy day! (Beckett, 1961: 9)

In the next excerpt, Winnie again bombards Willie with demands for seemingly trivial information, this time regarding the technical definition of a hog:

> WINNIE: Hog's setae. [*Puzzled expression.*] What exactly is a hog? [*Pause.*] A sow of course I know, but a hog...

This question hangs for some fifteen pages of text before Winnie returns to it:

WINNIE: What is a hog exactly? [*Pause. Turns slightly towards* WILLIE.] what exactly is a hog, Willie, do you know, I can't remember. [*Pause. Turning a little further, pleading.*] What *is* a hog, Willie, please! [*Pause.*]

WILLIE: Castrated male swine. [*Happy expression appears on* WINNIE's *face.*] Reared for slaughter. [*Happy expression increases*] (Beckett, 1961: 7, 22).

Here we witness a clear example of the tactics employed by the 'warring opposites': the will strives tirelessly to put the intellect in motion so as to then receive a motive. In turn, the intellect attempts to refuse to provide the will a motive for action.

In ACT I of *Happy Days*, then, we witness a multifaceted approach to ascetic practice, an approach that incorporates both 'traditional' and unconventional methods of asceticism. Ultimately, though, we are witness to a failed attempt at ascetic practice as Willie is unable to maintain his silence. By regularly yielding to the ceaseless pressure of the will, and providing a motive for action (WWR 1: 106, 307-8), however trivial it may seem (Beckett, 1961: 6), Willie permits Winnie to transition from one habitual state to the next, and thus to avoid the pain that accompanies the lack of a desired object, namely Schopenhauerian *boredom*: the mind minus a motive, experiencing the full force of willing (WWR 1: 364). In Beckettian terms, Willie is unable to maintain his silence and thus hold Winnie in a 'perilous zone' where she can no longer avoid knowledge of her own suffering, the 'suffering of being' (Beckett, 1999: 18-19).

Thus Winnie is simply able to *evade* knowledge previously deemed by the will to be distressing, or harmful:

WINNIE: ... all comes back. [*Pause.*] All? [*Pause.*] No, not all. [*Smile.*] No no. [*Smile off.*] Not quite. [*Pause.*] A part (Beckett, 1961: 7).

We recall that Schopenhauer similarly suggests that the will is able to 'prohibit' the intellect from having certain representations 'by absolutely preventing certain trains of thought from arising' (WWR 2: 208).

Part of the will's ability to deny the presentation of harmful knowledge is to have the intellect present a raft of harmless knowledge instead. Indeed, the provision of trivial facts about the world provides Winnie with a storehouse of motives which she may draw upon to get through the day—(motives such as the definition of a hog, the way one refers to one's hair, the contents of the shopping bag – which we may note Willie gave to Winnie (Beckett, 1961: 23) – her parasol, her song, and so on). Because Willie continues, however reluctantly, to provide new motives to Winnie, Winnie never runs out of distractions, and is able to *rebuff* Willie's attempts to provide another version of 'love', and thus another version of her childhood, namely the involuntary memory (Beckett, 1999: 72-3) of having been sexually abused (WWR 2: 208).

ACT II of *Happy Days*: Silence

In the stage direction that establishes the setting at the beginning of ACT II, the audience discovers Winnie now embedded up to her neck. Winnie is no longer able to 'turn, nor bow, nor raise' her head (Beckett, 1961: 23). Similarly she is no longer able to delve into 'the bag' for a distraction when she begins to feel the effects of boredom take hold. As a consequence, Winnie resorts to listing the things

that she is able to see (Beckett, 1961: 24-25). The reason for this *progression*, in ascetic terms, is that the knowing subject, Willie, has for a long time now refused to 'speak', or, in other words, refused to provide a motive for action. Winnie is therefore 'embedded' to the extent to which Willie is able to maintain his silence:

> WINNIE: May one still speak of time? [*Pause.*] Say it is a long time now, Willie, since I saw you. [*Pause.*] Since I heard you... There is so little one can speak of... one speaks of it all (Beckett, 1961: 23).

It is clear from the above-cited passage that Winnie is beginning to run out of things to say, or more specifically, Winnie is about to reach the point when she begins to 'speak' about things that she has fought to keep 'quiet': namely, childhood trauma:

> WINNIE: Ah well, not to know, not to know for sure, great mercy, all I ask ... Ah yes ... then ... now ... beechen green ... this ... Charlie ... kisses ... this ... all that ... deep trouble for the mind (Beckett, 1961: 24).

During the self-directed production of *Happy Days* at the Royal Court theatre, Beckett described this process in the following way: 'When the outer help wears out, she goes back into herself... a kind of inward meditation' (Knowlson, 1985: 130). No longer distracted from her suffering, Winnie is also no longer able to conflate early acts of abuse with later romantic occasions. The kisses once ascribed to later suitors are now remembered in their correct, earlier, context. Beckett made the affect of this habit-denying process more explicit in his self-directed production of the play. When 'going back into herself', Winnie recalls the memory

of her childhood in the following disturbing way: 'I close... knees again... in the backyard...' (Knowlson, 1985: 137).

With regards to the theoretical framework that I have established to read Beckettian theatre of asceticism, I believe Act II is a clear evocation of the Beckettian dynamically sublime, which, as I have argued, is a development of Schopenhauerian aesthetic theory. By remaining silent, and thus refusing to provide a motive for action, Willie utilizes the intellect's negative freedom to hold Winnie, the will, at bay (WWR 1: 202). Willie's silence – the non-provision of a motive – forces the ever-striving Winnie to deplete her stocks of existing motives, i.e. the contents of the bag, and then, in ACT II, all she is able to see; as such, Winnie is placed in a 'perilous zone' (Beckett, 1999: 18-19) where the will is denied the pain-free state of habitual consciousness. In this state, Winnie begins to suffer from the absence of an object towards which she may direct her attention. In short, Winnie suffers the pain of Schopenhauerian-defined 'boredom': 'a feeling of the most frightful desolation and emptiness' (WWR 1: 364). Denied painless habitual consciousness, the individual will is revealed to itself – via an 'involuntary memory' (Beckett, 1999: 72-3) – as a being that has suffered, in this case, a being that has endured abuse:

WINNIE: What now? [*Pause.*] What now, Willie? [*Long pause.*] There is my story of course, when all else fails. [*Pause.*] A life... A long life... Mildred has memories... She is now four or five already and has recently been given a big waxen dolly ... The sun was not well up when Milly rose, descended the steep... [*Pause.*] ... slipped on her nightgown, descended all alone the steep wooden staircase... tiptoed down the silent passage, entered the nursery and began to undress Dolly. [*Pause.*] Crept under the table and began to undress Dolly. [*Pause.*] Scolding her... the while. [*Pause.*] Suddenly a mouse – [*Long pause.*] Gently,

> Winnie. [*Long pause.*] Willie! [*Pause. Louder.*] Willie! ... all this time, it is not like you to be wantonly cruel (Beckett, 1961: 26).

Here Winnie begins to remember the painful events of her childhood. The voluntary memory of pleasant afternoons spent in the garden makes way for the more complete, involuntary memory of suffering. One may note in this passage that Winnie pleads for Willie to intervene, and to provide a distraction from the full force of the looming involuntary memory. However, Willie maintains his silence. After a short period of time in which Winnie is again able to momentarily distract herself – in this instance with the story of Mr. and Mrs. Shower's coming and going – Winnie, now absent a motive, or another voluntary memory, is compelled to experience the involuntary memory of childhood abuse:

> WINNIE: And now? [*Pause. Low.*] Help ... Help, Willie... No? [*Long pause. Narrative.*] Suddenly a mouse ran up her thigh and Mildred, dropping Dolly in her fright, began to scream – [WINNIE *gives a sudden piercing scream*] – and screamed and screamed – [WINNIE *screams twice*] – screamed and screamed and screamed till all came running... (Beckett, 1961: 28).

Thus in contrast to the nostalgising voluntary memory of happily sitting on Charlie Hunter's knee, the involuntary memory of Winnie's childhood is one of being undressed, 'scolded', and experiencing the confusion, and terror of abuse.

Failure to break the will

> An individual cannot deliberately bring about denial of the will – more than knowledge of true nature is required – i.e. the will must deny it itself (Atwell, 1995: 164).

Despite this experience of personally felt suffering (WWR 1: 397), Winnie is not broken by such knowledge, and therefore does not freely resign from life (WWR 1: 285). Rather, Winnie again reverts to a romanticised understanding of her life; in this case Winnie recalls the day Willie proposed to her:

> WINNIE: That day... The pink fizz ... The last guest gone... The look... Sing. Sing your old song, Winnie (Beckett, 1961: 29).

In response to this reminiscence Willie reappears at the front of the mound – as was Winnie's earlier want (Beckett, 1961: 21) – and breaks his vow of silence by saying the word, 'Win' (Beckett, 1961: 31). In Schopenhauerian terms, Willie has been unable to endure in suffering. Regardless of the ambiguity of what has been said, or the reason that Willie has returned – most likely to destroy the Winnie-Willie pseudocouple – his breaking his vow of silence has presented Winnie with a motive for action (WWR 1: 300-1; WWR 2: 358). Thus Willie's failure to break the will is displayed by Beckett as the intellect doing what the intellect does when acting as a servant of the will, that is, presenting a motive to the will. This contrasts with the way that Beckett displays his successful ascetics who, having broken their will, cease to respond in any way.

What, then, is the reason for Winnie's refusal, as the willing subject, to freely abolish herself? What enables Winnie to go on? I believe that Beckett's ultimate

point regarding *Happy Days* is two-fold. First, through the play *Happy Days*, Beckett reveals Willie's ascetic method of *silence* to be an ineffective one. Whilst silence is the goal of the ascetic practitioner, the technique of silence, or complete refusal to respond, as a means of bringing about silence is shown to be wholly ineffective. Beckett's insight in this regard is that one must continue to appear to act as a servant of the will at all times. Winnie herself reveals the ultimate flaw of Willie's ascetic method:

> WINNIE: Days perhaps when you hear nothing... But days too when you answer... So that I may say at all times, even when you do not answer and perhaps hear nothing, something of this is being heard, I am not merely talking to myself... That is what enables me to go on... (Beckett, 1961:8).

Beckett's ultimate position on Willie's vow of silence is that silence as a tactic is unable to generate the requisite level of uncertainty to hold the will in the perilous zone between motives, that is, the willing subject can continue to expect the provision of a motive at some point in time. Whilst Pozzo and Hamm endure genuine uncertainty, and are made to suffer the pain of boredom, Winnie knows that so long as she speaks, or strives, Willie is there and therefore may return to her and prove his love to her once more by providing her with a motive. Willie's silence permits Winnie to live in hope rather than uncertainty. In Beckettian tragedy, silence is a signifier of ascetic success, but not a successful ascetic method. It is 'the allurement of hope' that permits Winnie to go on, even though as a result of 'the hard experience of her own sufferings or in the vividly recognised sufferings of others, knowledge of the vanity and bitterness of life' have come close to her (WWR 1: 379).

Secondly, Winnie's resignation is not something that Willie can *cause*. Though Willie may, through his representation-depriving behaviour, encourage Winnie to

gain some awareness of suffering, that suffering will not necessarily result in resignation:

> Consequently, there can be no causal explanation of the denial of the will, that is, no explanation of the form: 'Whenever suffering – whether merely known or personally felt – occurs, denial of the will is causally produced.' No, every case of denial of the will is a case of freedom; it is a case of the will's freely denying itself (Atwell, 1995: 159).

The 'only direct expression of the *freedom of the will*' (WWR 1: 395) is solely, and therefore ultimately, a matter for the will. Whilst the intellect can place the will in a position of suffering, and can seek to present the will with knowledge of suffering, the intellect cannot ensure that the 'will' will then turn its back on life:

> ... one can deliberately engineer suffering, but true salvation does not come about by intention or design (Janaway, 2002: 113; see Atwell, 1995: 164).

Release from one's servitude is a matter of 'grace' (WWR 1: 404). It is fundamentally a matter for the will to decide. Whilst 'knowledge of the bitterness of life has come close' (WWR 1: 379), Winnie remains unbroken. In essence, Winnie refuses to acknowledge the suffering 'Other', which in this case is the pain she experienced as a child. Thus the refusal to acknowledge the suffering 'Other' results in the will's continued striving. In Beckettian thought, one affirms life, then, by *not* acknowledging the suffering 'Other', and by not acknowledging the 'truth'. This is, if anything, an inversion of Badiou's claims about Beckettian art (Badiou, 2003: 22). Winnie goes on by refusing to allow the truth to arrive.

Beckett signifies the will's withholding of 'grace', in the same way that he signifies the will's resignation, namely through the metaphors of 'sight' and 'silence'. Whereas in *Waiting for Godot*, and *Endgame*, the act of grace is signified by the will's loss of sight and the intellect's inability to respond, in *Happy Days* the withholding of grace is signified by the will's ongoing ability to 'see', and the intellect's ongoing ability to speak.

Conclusion

Over against the majority of Beckett's interpreters I argue that two of Beckett's middle period tragedies depict the cessation of action. This cessation is the state of nothingness that occurs when the Beckettian will not to suffer resigns from life. This event occurs in *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*. Beckett depicts the will-less state of 'nothing' through the will's loss of sight, and the intellect's inability to speak. By revealing both the successful and unsuccessful methods for breaking one's will, Beckettian tragedy not only *implicitly* advocates resignation (WWR 2: 433-4), it *explicitly* teaches one how to resign (cf. Nietzsche, 1968: 434-5). The Beckettian method for breaking the will utilizes many of the ascetic methods that Schopenhauer outlines in the Fourth Book of *The World as Will and Representation*. Beckett's ascetic intellect's employ the methods of self-castigation, celibacy, fasting, and self-mortification. In addition to this well-established means of mortifying the will, the Beckettian intellect also employs an ascetic method that attempts to deprive the will of spatio-temporal knowledge. The enactment of the Beckettian dynamically sublime deprives the will of habitual knowledge, which leaves the will unable to act, and therefore susceptible to devastating involuntary memories of previously unacknowledged suffering.

Having completed a detailed, play-by-play analysis of Beckettian asceticism I now turn to a discussion of the main problem that faces the ascetic practitioner, the contemplation of suicide. As we observed at the end of *Happy Days*, the

contemplation of suicide is a significant problem for the ascetic intellect. Only those Beckettian knowing subjects who refuse to present the motive of suicide to the willing subject continue to hold the willing subject in a position of suffering in which he or she becomes aware of the ubiquity of suffering, and from which he or she freely chooses to resign from life.

Chapter 10: Schopenhauerian Suicide and Beckettian Suicidal Contemplation

The problem of suicidal contemplation in Beckettian theatre of asceticism

> Suicide, the arbitrary doing away with the individual phenomenon, differs most widely from the denial of the will-to-life, which is the only act of its freedom to appear in the phenomenon ... Far from being denial of the will, suicide is a phenomenon of the will's strong affirmation. For denial has its essential nature in the fact that the pleasures of life, not its sorrows, are shunned. The suicide wills life, and is dissatisfied merely with the conditions on which it has come to him. Therefore he gives up by no means the will-to-life, but merely life, since he destroys the individual phenomenon. He wills life, wills the unchecked existence and affirmation of the body, but the combination of circumstances does not allow of these, and the result for him is great suffering (WWR 1: 398).

ESTRAGON: Let's hang ourselves immediately! (Beckett, 1956: 17)

To better understand the importance of the motif of suicidal contemplation in Beckettian theatre, I believe one must also understand the problem of suicide in Schopenhauerian thought: suicide fundamentally interrupts the process of breaking the will. For Schopenhauer, the subject of knowing's presentation of suicide as a motive allows the will to strive – in this case towards the objective of destroying oneself – and therefore to avoid knowledge of *essential* suffering.

It is for this reason that Schopenhauer describes suicide as 'the masterpiece of Maya':

> the most blatant expression of the contradiction of the will-to-life with itself ... the one individual declares war on itself. The vehemence with which it wills life and revolts against what hinders it, namely suffering, brings it to the point of destroying itself, so that the individual will by an act of will eliminates the body that is merely the will's own becoming visible, rather than that suffering should break the will (WWR 1: 399).

In contrast to suicide, which is an act of egoism that is predicated on the illusion of one's individuality, asceticism is an awareness of 'the inherent and possible sufferings of all who draw their breath' (Singh, 2007: 51). Whereas in the act of suicide the individual makes way for 'another' to suffer in his or her place, by breaking the will the knowing subject ends suffering within the objectification of the broken will (WWR 1: 382). The successful ascetic does this by ensuring that within the body of the broken will the principle of individuation – time and space – no longer exists.

The way Schopenhauer differentiates between the consequences of taking one's life, and the effect of breaking the will is a valuable way of understanding the motif of suicidal contemplation in *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*, and *Happy Days*. In these three Beckett tragedies there are, broadly speaking, two approaches taken by the Beckettian intellect to the alleviation of suffering. The first of these approaches, the *contemplation* of suicide, ensures that that a pseudocouple will continue to strive and therefore continue to suffer. The second approach, namely that of breaking the will, can only be achieved if the intellect refuses to provide any respite to the will, including the thought that one can always end one's suffering by ending one's life. In Beckett's middle-period tragedies, only 'servants of the will' who do not present the motive of suicidal contemplation attain their freedom by breaking the will.

The *contemplation* of suicide is the last and therefore most significant obstacle in a knowing subject's attempts to break the will through ascetic practice. The contemplation of suicide ensures that the ascetic process fails, and that the process must start once again from the beginning. In Beckettian thought, the contemplation of suicide – the thought that 'when all else fails, I can always end my suffering' – is depicted as an idea that provides last ditch 'hope' to the willing subject. That one can always *do something* about suffering, suggests that suffering is ultimately avoidable, and thus permits one to continue to hope, that is, to strive. Therefore, far from transcending the will-to-life, the act, or contemplation, of suicide is merely another way that the will is permitted to express itself (Jacquette, 2005: 134).

Thus one could argue that at the core of Beckettian thought is the importance of 'hopelessness': the ascetic knowing subject must deprive the willing subject of *all* hope. Only in this way does suffering become unbearable.

This understanding of Beckett's work in turn builds upon Horkheimer's understanding of Schopenhauerian philosophy. For Horkheimer, the significance of Schopenhauerian thought is its *hopelessness*, and the deleterious affect that living without hope has upon egoistic thought. Schopenhauerian thought leads to an understanding 'that solidarity stems from hopelessness' (Horkheimer, 1980: 32). Rather than rallying humanity to better its situation by, as Horkheimer recounts, calling for 'Decision, or for Engagement, or for the Courage to Be' (Horkheimer, 1980: 21), Schopenhauer calls for us to appreciate that life is the way it is, not because of something we have failed to do but rather because of something we have failed to appreciate: we live in a universe that can only punish striving (Dienstag, 2006: 108). To accept that life is 'a place of atonement' (Schopenhauer, 2004: 49) results in a stance towards the world where human beings 'seek nothing positive from it' but instead 'concentrate on minimizing their shared pain' (Janaway, 1999a: 324). The problem with hope, then, is that it has the propensity to increase suffering by encouraging egoism. Similarly, I believe Beckett argues that the problem of egoism can only dawn on the willing subject that has been denied all hope.

This position on the subject of 'hope' contrasts markedly with the position one finds in the work of Badiou. In Badiou's reading of late Beckettian art it is the 'hope of truth' (Badiou, 2003: 22) which permits one to 'go on', that is, it is hope that ensures that one lives in such a way as to facilitate a future in which 'happiness' is possible. Happiness is predicated on the individual acknowledging the 'Other', as this recognition promotes the possibility of love. 'Happiness can only exist in love' (Badiou, 2003: 33). In contrast to Badiou's position on 'hope' in Beckett's work, I argue that it is only by denying the willing subject any hope of relief that life can then be acknowledged as something that is ultimately unbearable. Hope permits one to continue to suffer. Rather than providing hope, Beckett's work is the determination to deny all hope. In Beckettian tragedy it is the willing subjects desire not to know the truth, the will-not-to-know (WWR 2: 208), which permits the will to go on.

The Motif of Suicide

In Beckett's tragic works suicide is contemplated often. Indeed, across the three plays that are the focus of this thesis, certain characters, or pseudocouples, contemplate, or demand the motive of suicide on no less than fifteen separate occasions. To break this figure down, suicide is contemplated six times in *Waiting for Godot* (Beckett, 1956: 10, 17, 34, 53, 93-94), four times in *Endgame* (Beckett, 1958: 15, 29, 41, 49), and five times in *Happy Days* (Beckett, 1961: 4, 14, 23, 25, 29). In terms of frequency alone, suicidal contemplation must be considered a major theme both *within* and *across* a number of Beckett's tragic works.

Yet despite the prevalence of this particular theme in Beckett's work, comparatively little has been written about its import. Whilst a number of authors have mentioned the motif of suicide in passing, the subject of suicide in Beckett's

work is rarely granted the attention that the frequency of its elicitation by Beckett appears to warrant.[lxvii]

In addition to this, when the subject of suicide in Beckett's oeuvre is raised it tends to be incorporated into existing – more often than not, existential – frameworks for understanding the works as ultimately affirmative in nature (see Büttner, 2000; Valentine, 2009; White, 2012). Understood within the interpretive framework of existentialism, the inability of Beckett's characters to either take the matter of suicide seriously, or to go ahead and act upon such self-destructive thoughts, is viewed by a number of Beckett's interpreters as confirmation that Beckett is to be understood as an affirmative artist who refuses to succumb to the nihilism of suicide.

Büttner's work provides an example of this line of thinking:

> Complete resignation could lead to the wish to finish one's life, but whereas Beckett's protagonists often reflect on suicide as a way of ending their suffering – Didi and Gogo particularly come to mind – they never follow through. In Beckett's great plays there are always some glimpses of hope... (2000: 116; see also Valentine, 2009: 137-8).[lxviii]

It is somewhat perverse that one is held to affirm existence by continually rejecting thoughts of suicide that occur to one because of one's existence.

In contrast to the existential readings of the motif of suicide in Beckett's work, I believe the contemplation of suicide in Beckettian tragedy is a problem because it affirms life. The contemplation of suicide must be understood as an act that has dire consequences for a number of Beckett's will-denying tragic characters. It is the contemplation of suicide that allows for the 'glimpses of hope' that Büttner

mentions: *If my suffering ever becomes unbearable I can always end my life. And because of this thought, my suffering never becomes unbearable, and therefore I continue to strive, which causes further suffering. One can always do something about one's suffering.* It is for this very reason that suicidal contemplation is a significant problem when attempting to attain freedom from the will, which as we have seen requires the knowing subject to hold the will at bay (WWR 1: 202). It is not the case, then, that hope precludes suicide, but rather that suicidal contemplation permits hope.

Whilst suicidal contemplation takes a variety of forms in Becket's theatre of asceticism – Beckett's characters contemplate death by hanging, drowning, blunt force trauma, handgun, and falling from a great height – the consequence of such contemplation is rather more consistent. A *systematic* understanding of Beckett's approach to the subject of suicide is available to the reader who is cognisant of Beckett's work as 'theatre of asceticism': to contemplate suicide is, perversely enough, to provide short-term relief to the part of oneself which makes one suffer: the willing subject. The contemplation of suicide permits the will to life to go on:

VLADIMIR:	Was I asleep, while the others suffered? Am I sleeping now? ... We have time to grow old. The air is full of our cries... But habit is a great deadener... I can't go on! What have I said?
BOY:	Mister... Mr. Albert ...
VLADIMIR:	Off we go again (Beckett, 1956: 91).

Here, having recounted his growing awareness of the ubiquity of suffering we witness Vladimir's evocation of suicidal contemplation – 'I can't go on.' Having contemplated his own demise, that is, having prioritized his own suffering, Vladimir forgets about suffering *per se*, and resumes the process of pursuing his

own wellbeing. In short, his contemplation of suicide ensures that he continues to strive.

When read in the light of Schopenhauerian philosophy we may feasibly read the contemplation of suicide in Beckettian theatre as an inability to persist in the non-relief of suffering. For in Schopenhauerian thought, as in Beckettian theatre, thoughts of suicide demarcate the moment when the sufferer wishes their suffering to end. In addition to this shared understanding, in Beckettian theatre – as in Schopenhauerian philosophy – suicidal contemplation also marks the moment when the sufferer wishes his or her suffering to end before a particular moment arrives: the moment when his or her will is broken. To use a Schopenhauerian analogy, the thought of suicide is the moment the sufferer stops the operation that might cure him or her (WWR 1: 399), and turns his or her back on the idea of being free from suffering:

> Just because the suicide cannot cease willing, he ceases to live; and the will affirms itself here even through the cessation of its own phenomenon, because it can no longer affirm itself otherwise. But as it was just the suffering it thus shunned which, as mortification of the will, could have led it to the denial of itself and to salvation, so in this respect the suicide is like a sick man who, after the beginning of a painful operation that could completely cure him, will not allow it to be completed, but prefers to retain his illness (WWR 1: 399–400).

This understanding – that in the contemplation of suicide something other than the prospect of death occurs – positions Beckett as a thinker who sees another either/or to that of life or death. The other either/or in Beckettian art is that of the contemplation of suicide or breaking the will. This suggests that another state of being is being proposed in Beckettian art. It also suggests that the main reason such a state is not attained is the contemplation of suicide. Therefore the contemplation of suicide, far from being a perverse affirmation of life *per se*, or a

refusal to slide into nihilism (Valentine, 2009) because one does not act upon such thoughts, may mark the moment when one fails to break one's will and again steps back from the possibility of experiencing permanent compulsion-free knowledge (WWR 1: 390).[lxix]

Two Types of Knowledge

Through the act of suicide, a person prevents the only thing that can break the will from occurring:

> The will itself cannot be abolished by anything except *knowledge*. Therefore the only path to salvation is that the will should appear freely and without hindrance, in order that it can *recognize or know* its own inner nature in the phenomenon. Only in consequence of this knowledge can the will abolish itself, and thus end the suffering that is inseparable from its phenomenon. This, however, is not possible through physical force, such as the destruction of the seed or germ, the killing of the new-born child, or suicide (WWR 1: 400, 330).

As discussed at length in the three preceding chapters, I believe knowledge of suffering is central to both Schopenhauerian and Beckettian quietism. It is through personally felt suffering alone that the majority of those who acquire an understanding of the unity of existence, and therefore the ubiquity of suffering, reach that understanding (WWR 1: 393). Thus suffering is both the medium and the message: to suffer is to acquire knowledge of phenomenal life as suffering. The more one suffers, the more one knows. In turn, the more one knows, the more one suffers. In both Schopenhauerian and Beckettian thought, then, phenomenal life must be maintained so that the lessons of suffering can be learned. Central to this objective – breaking the will through knowledge – is the provision of the correct

type of knowledge to the will. The *kind* of knowledge that the knowing subject presents to the will defines what the will knows.

There are, essentially, two kinds of knowledge that the knowing subject can provide to the willing subject: the first is the type of knowledge that is subject to the principle of sufficient reason. This 'filtered' knowledge is the world as representation. Here the faculty of understanding (Schopenhauer, 1974a: 75; WWR 1: 11-12) takes the raw sensory data received by the body, and with it generates representations of individual things situated in space and time. For Schopenhauer, this kind of knowledge – that of a world divided up into innumerable individual things – is an 'illusion' (WWR 1: 353). To have the will act upon this kind of information, then, is to have the will proceed in error. Here the act of suicide is depicted as an 'extreme' form of egoism because the suicide misperceives suffering as something that is experienced by the individual alone (Young, 1987: 127; Young, 2005: 195), and not something that is largely caused by the erroneous belief that one is an individual.

The second type of knowledge is knowledge of the essential nature of the will. This kind of knowledge – that individuation is an illusion – is imparted by the knowing subject in a variety of ways, namely in aesthetic contemplation (WWR 1: 196), through a rare, innate appreciation of oneness (the Saint), and, finally, and more commonly, as a consequence of personally felt suffering (WWR 1: 392).

The provision of the first type of knowledge ensures that the will fails to recognise itself in 'others', and acts in such a way as to perpetuate suffering—both in the phenomenon through which it acts, and in other phenomena that come into contact with that individual (WWR 1: 354). On the other hand, the second type of knowledge may ultimately lead to the willing subject's resignation (WWR 1: 397). By presenting this kind of information, the knowing subject no longer deceives the willing subject about the nature of reality: namely that 'constant suffering is

essential to life' (WWR 1: 283, 318), and based upon this understanding, the will freely chooses to turn its back on life.

Schopenhauer's main argument against the act of suicide is that the act of terminating the individual phenomenon is nothing more than confirmation of the illusion generated by the first type of knowledge. Suicide is both the confirmation of an error, and the permanent foreclosure on the possibility of that error ever being corrected (WWR 1: 283, 399; Young, 1987: 127-8; Janaway, 2002: 110):

> The only cogent moral opposition to suicide is based on the fact that the suicide stands against the realization of the highest moral good in that for a genuine salvation from this world of misery he substitutes a merely apparent and illusory one (Schopenhauer, 1974b: Vol. II, 309).

In Schopenhauerian thought, then, the motive of suicide is the presentation of the type of knowledge that is provided by an intellect that remains the servant of the will (WWR 1: 176-177). As we have seen, the role of the knowing subject – the role for which it has evolved – is to provide the willing subject with motivation (WWR 1: 106). Motives allow the will to strive in a character-dependent way. In Schopenhauerian thought, suicide is a continuation of this relationship of give and take. By providing the motive of suicide, the knowing subject continues to provide a motive for action, and the willing subject continues to decide on a course of action that will relieve its personally felt suffering. By providing the drastic motive of suicide in response to the experience of extreme suffering that accompanies the will's on-going frustration, the knowing subject allows the will to continue to strive by destroying its objectification, the body. Because of the act of suicide, a flawed understanding of life – that suffering is inessential – remains unchallenged.

The intellect's provision of the motive of suicide affirms life, then, by ensuring that the will never suffers sufficiently to reach the understanding that suffering is

essential to life. Minus this information, the willing subject is never placed in a position from which it freely chooses to resign from willed life. Rather, through the act of suicide, one's striving after pleasurable outcomes, or, in other words, one's striving to avoid suffering is affirmed as the very meaning of life (See Magee, 1997: 222; Janaway, 1999a: 337; Young, 2005: 194).

Schopenhauer's critique of suicide – that suicide precludes knowledge of suffering by bringing the process of suffering to a premature end – provides a productive framework for understanding the motif of suicidal contemplation in Beckettian tragedy.

A Reading of Beckettian tragedy in the light of Schopenhauer's understanding of suicide

The False Dusk

The problem of suicidal contemplation can be understood as *the* problem of Beckettian theatre of asceticism. The contemplation of suicide is a 'habit' (Beckett, 1956: 91) that one must break if one is to break the will. Only those knowing subjects who refuse to present the motive of suicide to the willing subject continue to hold the willing subject in a position of suffering from which he or she freely chooses to resign from life. Denying the motive of suicide, then, is of paramount importance. The prospect of there being an end to suffering in the phenomenal realm ensures that the will continues to strive. Only by denying the motive of suicide, and thus removing the prospect of there being an end to the suffering that accompanies striving, does striving then become intolerable for the willing subject.

In Beckettian theatre of asceticism the success of a number of knowing subjects to free themselves from their willing subject must be read in the light of other knowing subjects who equally attempt to deny their will but whom fail to do so. Only in this way can we begin to see the Beckettian motif of suicidal contemplation as a comment upon the failure to persist in suffering. To ignore the actions of the Beckettian knowing subjects who do not contemplate suicide (O'Hara, 1981: 260), and who therefore *persist* in suffering, results in the tendency to portray suicidal contemplation as a legitimate means of getting through life (see, for example, Worton, 1994: 72-73; Büttner, 2000; Valentine, 2009: 137-138). More than this, it tends to portray suicidal contemplation as a legitimate means of persisting because it is, at certain times, the *only* means of doing so.

This tends to align Beckett with a particular, existential, reading of Nietzschean thought regarding the *utility* of suicidal contemplation, namely that the contemplation of suicide allows one to go on:

> The thought of suicide is a powerful solace: by means of it one gets successfully through many a bad night (Nietzsche, 1990: §157).

Here the very thought that one can bring the night to an end is enough to assist one through it (cf. Schopenhauer WWR 2: 240). This reading suggests a utility to the thought of suicide: suicide is the idea one has when one has run out of ideas. However, to hold that Beckett endorses a 'positive' position on the utility of suicidal contemplation, as a number of Beckett's interpreters have done, tends to overlook the negative effect of repeated suicidal contemplation in Beckett's theatre: rather than allowing one to get through many a bad night, it appears that the effect of suicidal contemplation is to *put one through* many a bad night:

ESTRAGON: Didi.

VLADIMIR: Yes.

ESTRAGON: I can't go on like this.

VLADIMIR: That's what you think (Beckett, 1956: 94).

This in itself problematises the existential reading of the motif of suicide in Beckett's work. Whereas in existential terms suicide is viewed as a kind of crutch one uses until one can again walk without it, that is, the idea of suicide permits one to go on when one cannot go on, in Beckettian theatre, the thought of suicide is portrayed as a crutch upon which, with repeated use, one becomes entirely reliant. Far from providing occasional assistance, the thought of suicide is the crutch that trips its user.

It seems that the existential reading of the motif of suicide in Beckettian tragedy – namely that suicidal contemplation is of some benefit because it permits life to go on – confuses the problem with the solution.

In addition to this, there is also an underlying assumption in the existential readings of Beckett's work that Beckett's characters contemplate suicide because at times suicidal contemplation is all one has. Can it be said that Beckettian theatre presents us with the idea that suicidal contemplation is, at certain moments in life, the only alternative? That there are Beckettian intellectual characters that in the face of suffering and despair *do not* contemplate suicide suggests that this is not the case.

Had the country road in *Waiting for Godot* been inhabited solely by the pseudocouple of Vladimir and Estragon, then one could possibly argue that Beckett and existentialism were of a piece on the subject of suicide. But as we know only too well, Pozzo and Lucky also traverse this stretch of country road prior to the fall of night. As with Vladimir and Estragon, Pozzo and Lucky also suffer. But unlike Estragon, who responds to Vladimir's inability to 'go on' with thoughts of hanging,

Lucky does not offer such *solace* to Pozzo when he declares that he is unable to 'bear it any longer' (Beckett, 1956: 34).

There is, then, I believe, an alternative to the contemplation of suicide presented in Beckettian theatre. This alternative is, of course, breaking the will through the practice of asceticism. A number of Beckett's middle-period tragedies provide both a method for ending the suffering of the compelled life, and a powerful critique of suicidal contemplation as a means of persisting in such life. To better understand the ascetic 'alternative' to suicidal contemplation we need to compare the actions of Estragon and Willie who both provide the motive of suicide to the will, to those of Lucky and Clov, neither of whom present the thought of suicide as a motive, and therefore refuse to provide a 'pain-killer' (Beckett 1958: 14, 16, 23, 34, 46). What are the implications of these different approaches to suffering?

Waiting for Godot: 'What do we do now?'

Whilst a variety of means of carrying out suicide are either contemplated, or remembered, in *Waiting for Godot* – such as drowning (Beckett, 1956: 53), leaping off the Eiffel Tower (Beckett, 1956: 10), and hanging (Beckett, 1956: 17, 53, 93-94) – in this section I shall focus on the means of suicide contemplated in the present of the play, namely that of hanging. However, that is not to suggest that one ought to overlook the fact that Vladimir and Estragon have a history of suicidal contemplation. One must bear this 'history' in mind as it is one of the reasons that we find Vladimir and Estragon here, waiting by the side of a country road, unable to proceed along the second path to knowledge of suffering (WWR 1: 393), but instead living in hope and contemplating death should the longed for event – that of Godot's arrival – not eventuate.

Estragon first recommends the motive of suicide in response to the frustration of boredom:

VLADIMIR: What do we do now?

ESTRAGON: Wait.

VLADIMIR: Yes, but while waiting.

ESTRAGON: What about hanging ourselves? (Beckett, 1956: 17).

This recommendation appears almost casual, suggested in the manner that one might recommend any other means of passing the time. In itself it suggests that the recommendation of suicide as a motive has become a habitual undertaking. Indeed, far from causing shock, Estragon's recommendation provides both relief and excitement:

VLADIMIR: Hmm. It'd give us an erection!

ESTRAGON: (*highly excited*). An erection!

VLADIMIR: With all that follows. Where it falls mandrakes grow. That's why they shriek when you pull them up (17).

Here thoughts of suicide are linked to procreation, of generation, of going on in some way. Thus suicide is allied to the very opposite of breaking the will, and suffering no more. Suicide, as with procreation, is an affirmation of the will. In death by hanging one ejaculates – there mandrakes grow – they shriek when you pull them out of the ground – that is, from one's death comes life, which is striving, which is suffering. In short, death by hanging fertilizes the will, by eradicating the

frustrated objectification (WWR 1: 281), and freeing up the space in which another objectification of the will can strive and therefore suffer.

By asking, 'What do we do now?' Vladimir still believes that something can always be 'done' to alleviate suffering, that is, Vladimir neither understands striving as the cause of suffering, nor that suffering is something that one cannot evade. By presenting Vladimir with the motive of suicide, Estragon again presents his willing subject with the type of knowledge that Schopenhauer describes as an 'illusion' (WWR 1: 353): Estragon presents Vladimir with the knowledge that his suffering can be brought to an end by striving.

In this first instance of suicidal contemplation we also begin to understand the importance of contemplating suicide to one's on-going ability to live in hope. In Beckett's tragedies the contemplation of suicide permits the will to continue to strive, which in *Waiting for Godot* comes in the form of hoping to receive word from Godot. Having begun to doubt that Godot will come, that is having lost hope:

> ESTRAGON: If he came yesterday and we weren't here you may be sure he won't come again today (Beckett, 1956: 15).

Vladimir is then permitted to regain hope by contemplating his self-destruction:

> ESTRAGON: What about hanging ourselves? (17)

Though following a protracted discussion about the technical aspects of suicide by hanging, Vladimir decides that he would prefer to wait for news from Godot after all:

VLADIMIR: I'm curious to hear what he has to offer. Then we'll take it or leave it (Beckett, 1956: 18).

In Beckett's work the contemplation of suicide permits the willing subject to strive (WWR 1: 399–400): the thought that one can always end one's suffering – the striving towards self-destruction – then permits one to again live in hope. The possibility of suicide ensures that the pain of longing remains tolerable because suicide provides one with the comforting thought that the pain of striving is something that can be brought to an end by further striving: 'then we'll take it or leave it'.

The second time that death by hanging is contemplated in *Waiting for Godot* occurs at the end of Act I. The character of the Boy, one of Godot's employees, has again brought news that Godot will not come this evening 'but surely tomorrow', that is, the Boy again provides Vladimir with hope. Shortly after, Vladimir conveys this message of hope to Estragon:

VLADIMIR: Tomorrow everything will be better.

ESTRAGON: How do you make that out?

VLADIMIR: Did you not hear what the child said?

ESTRAGON: No.

VLADIMIR: He said that Godot was sure to come tomorrow. (*Pause.*) What do you say to that?

ESTRAGON: Then all we have to do is wait on here.

VLADIMIR: Are you mad? We must take cover. (*He takes Estragon by the arm.*) Come on. (*He draws*

Estragon after him. Estragon yields, then resists. They halt.)

ESTRAGON: (*Looking at the tree.*) Pity we haven't got a bit of rope (Beckett, 1956: 52-53).

Here we see another evocation of the idea that suicide and hope exist in a correlative, or symbiotic relationship. One might wonder how Vladimir is able to go on hoping for something that shows few signs of ever happening. The answer is that his hope for a better tomorrow is always supported by the thought that tomorrow will be his last day on earth. Suicide is hope's hope. One might go so far as to say that suicidal contemplation breathes life into hope. In Beckett's theatre the contemplation of suicide is part of a cycle of suffering: hope causes one to suffer, which causes one to wish to end one's life, which allows one to strive, which allows one to hope, which causes one to suffer, which causes one to wish to end one's life...

We see this cycle of suffering at the end of Acts I and II of *Waiting for Godot.* Thoughts of suicide at the end of the day permit a forum for the return each night of hope, which in Beckett's theatre of asceticism arrives in the form of the character of the Boy (Beckett, 1956: 49-53). Hope of deliverance from suffering is thus associated with the naivety of youth. In Beckett's theatre, the contemplation of suicide, far from marking the moment of one's disillusionment, permits one to remain in a childlike state. Suicidal contemplation perversely allows one to remain naïve. I refer the reader to the inscription that appears on the cover page of the First Book of *The World as Will and Representation.* The inscription Schopenhauer chooses to mark his philosophy as 'mature' thought is that of Jean-Jacques Rousseau:

> *Sors de l'enfance, ami réveille-toi!* ("Quit thy childhood, my friend, and wake up.")

Similarly in Beckett's work, a naïve outlook on life is presented as childishness, as something that prevents one from waking up and becoming aware of the essential nature of life. One would rather die than wake up. Indeed, Vladimir is becoming aware that he is asleep and being allowed to sleep on (Beckett, 1956: 90-91). The thought of suicide – 'I can't go on' – prevents him from waking. Thus hope is sleep, and the contemplation of suicide ensures that one remains asleep.

As a brief aside, I shall take this opportunity to elaborate on the idea of the character of the 'Boy' as 'hope'. This character appears in various guises in Beckett's three ascetic tragedies. In *Waiting for Godot* the Boy, a servant of Godot, is the promise of tomorrow being different to that of today. The Boy brings news that tomorrow Godot will come (Beckett, 1956: 50; 91). In *Endgame* the Boy sitting outside the bunker – in all likelihood Clov's arrival as a child (see Little, 1978: 47) – presents Hamm with the opportunity of telling his story again (Beckett, 1958: 49). And in *Happy Days* the Boy arrives courtesy of the classified section of *Reynolds News* (Beckett, 1961: 5-6; 22):

> WILLIE: Opening for smart youth... Wanted bright boy (1961: 5-6; 22).

Is there a more hopeful time in one's life than when first starting out in the world? All three 'Boys', then, provide hope, and offer the prospect that one's suffering can be brought to an end. But the 'offer' of hope alone is insufficient. What factor, then, decides whether or not hope is *accepted*? As Vladimir cannot 'go on' suffering, the news that Godot will come tomorrow is again accepted. Hamm, on the other hand, now broken by knowledge of suffering, refuses hope in the form of the Boy sitting outside the window. In *Happy Days* the 'bright boy' wanted in the classifieds section offers the promise of today being the same as yesterday—another 'happy day' where Willie responds to Winnie's demands for information. Unlike Hamm, Winnie happily takes the same news day after day. Thus it seems that one is

broken depending upon one's *character*, and its ability to withstand or ignore suffering (WWR 1: 404). It also depends, however, upon whether or not the offer of hope is presented alongside, or in conjunction with, the possibility of suicide. Vladimir is offered the motive of suicide and he continues to hope. Winnie is offered the motive of suicide and she also continues to hope. Neither Hamm, nor Pozzo are ever presented with the option of suicide. Both Hamm and Pozzo ultimately lose hope.

I now return to the discussion of the complementarity of hope and suicide in *Waiting for Godot.*

The contemplation of suicide on Estragon's part permits Vladimir to live in hope, the non-fulfilment of which causes him to wish to end his life, which allows him to continue to strive *ad infinitum*:

> Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a dream fulfilled is a tree of life (Proverbs 13: 12).

This is Vladimir's motto for life, though now in the form of 'Hope deferred maketh the something sick (Beckett, 1956: 10)', a piece of scripture that Vladimir has taken to the forgotten organ in question. This is a piece of biblical wisdom which affirms the need for hope but also, perhaps inadvertently, offers a condemnation of living in such a way. According to Proverbs 13: 12, one is not to lose hope because as sick as it makes one, imagine when the long awaited day finally arrives and one is no longer sick. As with the scriptural encouragement to live in hope, Estragon's contemplation of suicide from said tree of life, though intended to relieve suffering – in the sense of 'if Godot doesn't come, then we can hang ourselves' – in fact promotes suffering.

The third and final occasion that hanging is contemplated – though the idea of 'finality' is something that *Godot's* two Act structure throws into doubt (Kenner, in Boxall, 2000: 73) – is at the end of Act II. Estragon's provision of the motive of suicide comes after a pivotal moment in Vladimir's suffering. Here Vladimir delivers a soliloquy that bears many similarities to that of Pozzo's earlier reflections on the essential, suffering, nature of life:

POZZO: They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more (Beckett, 1956: 89).

VLADIMIR: Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave-digger puts on the forceps. We have time to grow old. The air is full of our cries. (*He listens*). But habit is a great deadener. (*He looks again at Estragon*). At me too someone is looking, of me too someone is saying , he is sleeping, he knows nothing, let him sleep on. (*Pause*). I can't go on! (*Pause*). What have I said?

He goes feverishly to and fro, halts finally at extreme left, broods. Enter Boy right. He halts. Silence.

BOY: Mister... (*Vladimir turns*). Mr Albert...

VLADIMIR: Off we go again (Beckett, 1956: 90-91).

But unlike the now 'broken' Pozzo, in the case of Vladimir, the Boy again delivers a message of *hope* – 'the dream of him who is awake (WWR 2: 216)'. Vladimir, about to recognise as his own 'all the suffering of the world (WWR 1: 392)' again experiences hope in relation to his own wellbeing, and by so doing continues to sleep.

As we have already seen, Schopenhauer was well aware of this phenomenon, this drawing near to an understanding of reality, only to be pulled back by one's individual concerns:

> Even in the case of the individual who approaches this point [the awareness of universal suffering], the tolerable condition of his own person, the flattery of the moment, the allurement of hope, and the satisfaction of the will offering itself again and again, i.e., the satisfaction of desire, are almost invariably a constant obstacle to the denial of the will, and a constant temptation to a renewed affirmation of it (WWR 1: 392).

Having almost reached the point where he understands life as an event of ubiquitous suffering, Vladimir declares that he cannot go on. In saying this, Vladimir declares that he does not wish to suffer anymore. Thus Vladimir cannot turn his back on *his* life, cannot tear the veil of Maya, and see through the *principium individuationis*. His saying 'I can't go on' ensures that he will go on, because in response to it Estragon will once again confuse Vladimir's not wishing to suffer with no longer wanting to strive, and will again respond to Vladimir's striving not to suffer by contemplating suicide.

The cycle of suffering that Vladimir-Estragon are trapped within is succinctly captured near the end of Act II:

ESTRAGON:	You say we have to come back tomorrow?
VLADIMIR:	Yes.
ESTRAGON:	Then we can bring a good bit of rope.
VLADIMIR:	Yes.

ESTRAGON: Didi.

VLADIMIR: Yes.

ESTRAGON: I can't go on like this.

VLADIMIR: That's what you think.

ESTRAGON: If we parted? That might be better for us.

VLADIMIR: We'll hang ourselves tomorrow. Unless Godot comes.

ESTRAGON: And if he comes?

VLADIMIR: We'll be saved (Beckett, 1956: 94).

The consequence, then, of habitually providing the motive of suicide as a means of avoiding the suffering that comes from striving is that it allows one to continue to strive and thus perpetuates suffering.[lxx]

Pozzo and Lucky

The cycle of striving in which Vladimir and Estragon find themselves trapped, one perpetuated by thoughts of suicide, is put into stark relief by the behaviour of the play's other pseudocouple, Pozzo and Lucky.

Unlike Estragon, who habitually provides his willing subject with the solace of suicidal contemplation, Lucky does not provide the motive of suicide when his willing subject declares that he is no longer able to bear his suffering (Beckett, 1958: 34). Rather, Lucky understands that the only way that his suffering might come to an end is if he exacerbates it. Far from alleviating Pozzo's suffering, Lucky takes every opportunity to aggravate his situation (see Chapter 8).

When we first encounter Pozzo and Lucky we discover that they are on their way to the fair so that Pozzo may get rid of Lucky:

VLADIMIR: You want to get rid of him?

POZZO: I do. But instead of driving him away as I might have done, I mean instead of kicking him out on his arse, in the goodness of my heart I am bringing him to the fair, where I hope to get a good price for him. The truth is you can't drive such creatures away. The best thing would be to kill him (Beckett, 1956: 32)

Here we see a Beckettian evocation of the Schopenhauerian will's indifference to the individual phenomenon. Though particular slaves may come and go the will is always the master. Pozzo is seeking to get rid of Lucky in the hope of acquiring another slave, or 'intellect', that will perform the role of servant of the will, that is, present useable representations of the world. The will as thing in itself, as we have noted, is indifferent to individual objectifications of will, which to the will are mere phenomenal representations that exist in space and time. Life is certain to the will to life (WWR 1: 280). It will gladly get rid of one phenomenon, and replace it with another:

POZZO: As though I were short of slaves! (Beckett, 1956: 31)

We discover later that the reason Pozzo wishes to get rid of Lucky is because he can no longer bear the way that Lucky 'goes on', in reference to the manner in which Lucky now 'thinks':

POZZO: (*groaning, clutching his head*). I can't bear it... any longer ... the way he goes on... you've no idea... it's terrible... he must go... (*he waves his arms*)... I'm going mad... (*he collapses, his head in his hands*)... I can't bear it... any longer... (Beckett, 1956: 34).

This is a significant moment in Pozzo's suffering, as it evinces the wish for his suffering to end. Pozzo's 'I can't bear it any longer' is similar to that of Vladimir's, 'I can't go on'. Both are cries for help, or cues, if you will, for the knowing subject to intervene and to provide the motive of suicide, and thus to relieve the suffering that comes from striving. In response to Pozzo's cry for help, Lucky does nothing whatsoever to alleviate Pozzo's distress. Unlike Estragon who offers Vladimir recourse to suicide, Lucky's response to Pozzo's wish not to suffer is to heap more suffering upon him through the performance of the 'tirade' he delivers shortly thereafter. Lucky does not 'offer' to bring Pozzo's suffering to an end, as Lucky understands that Pozzo's demands for relief indicate he has not yet understood life as suffering (WWR 1: 400). To provide the motive of suicide, and thus to relieve Pozzo's suffering at this moment would be to provide Pozzo with the incorrect knowledge that suffering caused by striving can be alleviated by further striving. The fact that Pozzo wishes to 'get rid' of Lucky alerts Lucky to the fact that Pozzo wishes to continue striving. Pozzo has not yet turned his back on life despite the knowledge of suffering that Lucky has communicated to him. On the contrary, he wishes to rid himself of a particular knowing subject who Pozzo mistakenly believes is the cause of his pain. By refusing to provide the motive of suicide, Lucky refuses to 'interrupt' the procedure of breaking his individual will, of breaking Pozzo (WWR 1: 399).

Thus in *Waiting for Godot* we see two conflicting responses to the willing subject's explicit demands for the alleviation of suffering. Unlike Estragon, Lucky provides no recourse to suicide. To offer the motive of suicide would be equivalent to putting down his burden, accepting a handkerchief to dry his tears, and chewing on the scraps from Pozzo's table. Instead he prefers to carry his suitcase full of sand,

prefers that the running sore on his neck continues to weep, rejects sustenance, rejects compassion, and not once suggests that the rope with which he is driven 'on' be thrown over a bow of the willow tree and used as a means of ending his and Pozzo's suffering. Because of this, Pozzo gains knowledge of life as suffering, and turns his back on life (Beckett, 1956: 88; WWR 1: 379-80).

Endgame: 'Why don't you kill me?'

In *Endgame* the demands to be put out of one's misery have become more overt than in the earlier *Waiting for Godot*. Far from Vladimir's somewhat ambiguous declarations of no longer being able to 'go on', in the figure of Hamm we witness a number of unequivocal demands to be finished (Beckett, 1958: 15, 29, 41, 49). In response to these demands the character of Clov finds ways to respond other than acceding to Hamm's wishes.

There are, in effect, two parallel stories being told in *Endgame*. This is the game: bringing Hamm's story to an 'end'. The first story is that of Hamm, as told by Hamm. The second story is that of Hamm as told by Clov. Having reached an impasse in his story, his 'chronicle', Hamm wishes to 'end' his story with suicide:

> It is true that Hamm wants death . . . and one can say that his entire project is to achieve his death (Cavell, 2002: 133).

It is through the act of suicide that Hamm will move his story along. For Hamm, suicide is a plot device, a means of ensuring further striving by removing an objectification of the will in which striving is frustrated (WWR 1: 280):

> In the case of suicide, the will finds itself so hampered in its advances that it opts for its typical indifference for the individual phenomenon. Since life is forever assured to the will, which is why it is called the 'will-to-live', it gives no importance to its individual phenomena (Singh, 2007: 51).

Appreciating that the act of suicide will permit the story to continue, Clov refuses such an ending, (WWR 1: 399). Clov thus refuses to allow the *relief* of suicidal contemplation. Clov's refusal ensures that Hamm must go over the same story again and again without the prospect of it coming to an end, and thus suffer both the pain of boredom and, ultimately, the pain that comes from the more comprehensive knowledge – in the form of an involuntary memory – of one's intelligible character. In Clov's version of Hamm's life, Hamm has not been the benevolent person that he describes in his own self-aggrandizing story.

In short, both Hamm and Clov are trying to 'break' one another. Whereas Clov is attempting to place Hamm in a position of suffering from which he freely chooses to resign from life, Hamm is attempting to drive Clov to suicide. The will has declared war on itself (WWR 1: 399), as in turn the intellect has declared war on the will.

It is Hamm's intention to drive Clov 'mad' (Beckett, 1958: 49), so that he provides Hamm with the motive of suicide. Hamm attempts to achieve this outcome by demanding an endless succession of petty 'moves', or provocations. This tactic is established early in the play. Frustrated by Clov's refusal to provide him with his 'pain-killer', or a motive for action (WWR 1: 106), and thus to relieve his boredom, Hamm then begins to order Clov about the room, or in Schopenhauerian terms, sets the intellect in motion (WWR 2: 213):

HAMM: How are your eyes?

CLOV: Bad.

HAMM: How are your legs?

CLOV: Bad.

HAMM: But you can move.

CLOV: Yes.

HAMM: (*violently*). Then move! (*Clov goes to the back wall, leans against it with his forehead and his hands.*) Where are you?

CLOV: Here.

HAMM: Come back! (*Clov returns to his place beside the chair*). Where are you?

CLOV: Here.

This seemingly pointless toing and froing – much like the moving of a chess piece from one position on the board to another and then, for lacking an alternative, returning it to its previous position (Cohn, 1973: 152) – ends with this question:

HAMM: Why don't you kill me? (Beckett, 1958: 14-15)

As the Beckettian 'will not to suffer', Hamm wishes to avoid suffering at all costs—if not by sleep, then by a 'pain-killer' (a motive), and, if a pain-killer is not forthcoming, then by death. The tactic that Hamm uses to elicit the response of suicide is to tirelessly order Clov back and forth in the hope that Clov will concede and end the game Hamm's way. This kind of provocation permeates the play.

The next move on Hamm's part is to seek to elicit the motive of suicide through self-castigation. Beckett is alive to the fact that the same knowledge that can be imparted to break the will – that is, an involuntary memory of the suffering one has caused – can also be used to generate self-pity, and thus the motive of suicide:

HAMM: One day you'll be blind like me. You'll be sitting there, a speck in the void, in the dark, for ever, like me ...Yes, one day you'll know what it is, you'll be like me, except that you won't have anyone with you, because you won't have had pity on anyone...

Again, this 'move' ends with the demand that the intellect motivates the will with the motive of suicide:

HAMM: Why don't you finish us? (Beckett, 1958: 28-29)

In response to this demand, Clov replies by saying, 'I couldn't finish you.' For Clov to 'finish' Hamm is to do Hamm's bidding as an entity that tirelessly strives not to suffer (Pothast, 2008: 88-9). Clov's response also alerts us to the idea that ultimately the subject of willing must finish him or herself (WWR 1: 398). As the willing subject, Hamm must choose to turn away from life (WWR 1: 412), or, if you will, concede. Only when the individual will to life *turns its back on life*, in Schopenhauerian terms, or *ceases to tell its story*, (Nussbaum, 1990: 287-8) in Beckettian terms, does suffering come to an end. Far from turning away from life, the act of suicide is one of turning away from suffering, which in *Endgame* is depicted as writer's block.

In the abovementioned passage Clov also displays a profound awareness that the act of suicide would not end in the destruction of striving *per se*, but merely result

in the end of the individual phenomenon. Whereas Hamm uses the word 'us' – 'why don't you finish us?' – Clov appears to understand that by presenting Hamm with the motive of suicide only he, the knowing subject, would be finished. Hence Clov's response alters the 'us' to 'you': 'I couldn't finish you'. Unlike Estragon, who continues to believe that 'the best thing' for Vladimir to do would be to kill him 'like billions of others' (Beckett, 1956: 62), Clov refuses to allow another objectification of the will to take his place where suffering occurs, that is, in space and time (WWR 1: 281).

In essence, Clov refuses to fertilize the will with the death of Hamm, a frustrated objectification of the will. Denying this 'fertilization', Clov also denies the prospect of renewed striving:

HAMM:	Did your seeds come up?
CLOV:	No.
HAMM:	Did you scratch round them to see if they had sprouted?
CLOV:	They haven't sprouted.
HAMM:	Perhaps it's still too early.
CLOV:	If they were going to sprout they would have sprouted. (*Violently.*) They'll never sprout (Beckett, 1958: 17).

We may compare Clov's refusal to fertilize the will to Vladimir's response to the prospect of suicide, and the thought that suicide will generate further striving and further suffering. Remarking that suicide by hanging would provide Vladimir with an erection, and possibly an orgasm, Vladimir comments on the prospect of on-going life, and on-going suffering:

VLADIMIR: Where it [ejaculate] falls mandrakes grow. That's why they shriek when you pull them up (Beckett, 1956: 17).

Further recourse to suicidal contemplation occurs later in the play, after Hamm has recounted his 'chronicle'. Clov is asked to show interest in the progress of the story. When asked 'Will it not soon be the end?', Hamm replies 'I'm afraid it will' (Beckett, 1958: 41). Clov is rightly sceptical about Hamm's assertion. Indeed, the end Hamm has in mind is not one of turning away from story telling but, rather, suicide:

HAMM: If I could drag myself down to the sea! I'd make a pillow of sand for my head and the tide would come in (Beckett, 1958: 41).

Unable to develop his story in any other way, Hamm contemplates drowning himself. This, then, is the 'end' that Hamm proposes. Clov's response to this wish is to reply, 'There's no more tide'. This is a two-fold act of asceticism: it both denies recourse to suicide in a *particular* instance, and denies Hamm the ability to make this particular move again.

The final occasion of suicidal contemplation in *Endgame* alerts us to the nature of the on-going war taking place within the bunker. In a series of rapid-fire demands towards the end of the play, Hamm attempts to again push Clov too far, that is, to the point where Clov will do Hamm's bidding and end his life. This is the tactic that Hamm has employed throughout the play: by his constant demands – often quite pointless demands – Hamm attempts to drive Clov to the point of distraction, and to end the story Hamm's way. One after the other, Clov is ordered to look out of the window, then to return Hamm to centre of the room after having moved his chair,

and finally to restore the toy dog to Hamm's arms (Beckett, 1958: 48-49). Out of sheer frustration, Clov hits Hamm with the stuffed toy, whilst declaring 'You drive me mad, I'm mad!' Disappointed at the object chosen to vent Clov's anger, Hamm suggests alternatives:

> If you must hit me, hit me with the axe. (*Pause).* Or with the gaff, hit me with the gaff. Not with the dog. With the gaff. Or with the axe.

In response to this demand Clov implores Hamm to stop 'playing', to which Hamm in turn replies, 'Never! Put me in my coffin' (Beckett, 1958: 49). This draws our attention to the fact that suicide is not the end for the will *per se*, but merely one objectification of the will. Far from being the end, Hamm views death as a means of continuing. The 'playing' will go on by Clov killing his master. As when Clov had earlier precluded drowning by removing the motive of 'tides' from the world, he now removes the motive of death *per se*. Clov will not put Hamm in his coffin because 'There are no more coffins'. There are no more coffins because there is no more death. If there is no more death there can be no more wanting to die. If death no longer exists, then suicide no longer exists as a means of attaining it.

It is because of this that Hamm ultimately refuses hope—delivered in Beckettian fashion by the Boy who now sits outside one of the bunker's windows (Beckett, 1958: 49). No longer believing that he can always kill himself if he begins to suffer too much – because there is no more death – Hamm also refuses hope. To deny suicide as a last resort undermines the entire mechanism of hope. Without the prospect of death, hope becomes intolerable. By the end of *Endgame* Hamm has suffered so much that he turns his back on life. The motive of the Boy sitting outside the bunker – which in all probability is Clov, and thus the story waiting to be retold (Little, 1978: 47) – is refused (Beckett, 1958: 50).

A Schopenhauerian-informed reading of the play *Happy Days* concludes this discussion of the motif of suicide in Beckett's theatre of asceticism.

Happy Days

As a means of escaping suffering, suicidal contemplation – or the thought that one can always end one's *own* suffering – features prominently in *Happy Days*. It is, to quote one of Beckett's stage directions, a 'conspicuous' aspect of the play (Beckett, 1961: 23). In *Happy Days* we again witness Beckett's concern that the willing subject's on-going expectation that the motive of suicidal contemplation will be provided permits the willing subject to live in hope, which in turn permits the will to continue to strive, and therefore to suffer. Here, the willing subject, Winnie, lives in the hope that the knowing subject, Willie, still loves her, and will prove his love by providing Winnie with 'help' (Beckett, 1961: 28), namely the provision of habitual – will-centred – material that precludes knowledge of suffering.

The willing subject, Winnie, perceives suicidal contemplation as an act of on-going devotion, indeed, of 'love'. Winnie lives in the hope that despite her knowing subject's silence, Willie will one day return to the front of the mound of earth in which she is buried alive (WWR 1: 388), and again assist her to perceive life romantically, or naively. Thus once again one of the key themes of Beckett's middle-period tragedies is the importance of hopelessness to the ascetic's task of breaking the will with knowledge of ubiquitous suffering. To show the willing subject that she has not been 'loved' in the past, Willie must refuse to prove his love in the present by refusing to afford Winnie the painlessness of habitual consciousness.

That the thought of suicide has a 'romantic' connotation for Winnie is revealed early on in the play:

[*Turns to bag, rummages in it, brings out revolver, holds it up, kisses it rapidly, puts it back...*] (1961: 4).

Through this kiss, Beckett reveals Winnie's association, or *conflation*, of suicidal contemplation with romance. The revolver is the thing that will reunite the willing and knowing subjects as an entity that seeks to avoid suffering.

Like Estragon and Vladimir, Winnie and Willie have a history of suicidal contemplation. However, unlike the intellectual 'Everyman', Estragon, the ascetic, Willie, no longer wishes to put himself 'out of his misery' by attempting suicide. Willie wishes to convey knowledge of suffering through suffering, and understands suicidal contemplation as the ultimate problem with regards to the alleviation of suffering:

WINNIE: [*She opens eyes, brings revolver front and contemplates it. She weighs it in her palm.*] You'd think the weight of this thing would bring it down among the ... last rounds. But no. It doesn't. Ever upmost, like Browning. [*Pause.*] Brownie... [*Turning a little towards Willie.*] Remember Brownie, Willie? [*Pause.*] Remember how you used to keep on at me to take it [the gun] away from you? Take it away, Winnie, take it away, before I put myself out of my misery (Beckett, 1961: 14).

To avoid thoughts of suicide, then, Willie has given away the means to carry it out, and situated himself in such a way that the revolver is out of reach. But whereas in Willie's case the non-contemplation of suicide is presented as the objective, in

Winnie's case it is Willie's non-contemplation of suicide that is cause for concern: 'your misery', she says '*derisively*' with regard to Willie's refusal to contemplate suicide, and thus prove his love. The longer that Willie goes without contemplating suicide the longer Winnie is permitted to suffer the thought that Willie will never prove his 'love' to her by providing her with habitual knowledge.

For Winnie, Willie's refusal to contemplate suicide is viewed as a lack of devotion. Thus the war that we witness in *Happy Days* is that of Willie's attempts to inflict suffering by refusing to provide any motivation, or 'love', to his willing subject, and Winnie's attempts to remind Willie of his marital obligations, and to have him return to her once more to carry them out. To this end Winnie uses the revolver as bait, a means of encouraging Willie to return, and to end his, and thus Winnie's, suffering:

> WINNIE: I'll leave you out, that's what I'll do. [*She lays revolver on the ground to her right.*] There, that's your home from this day out (Beckett, 1961: 14).

These are the key moments for our understanding of the motif of suicidal contemplation in Act I of *Happy Days*. It is in Act II of *Happy Days* that we witness the consequences of Willie's flawed ascetic method of absolute refusal to respond to the demands of his willing subject. In the preceding chapter on the topic of Beckettian asceticism I discussed the reason that Willie's ascetic method fails, namely that Willie's silence permits Winnie to live in hope rather than uncertainty. The consequence of permitting the willing subject to live in hope – by permitting it to believe that the silence, no matter how long it goes on, will eventually be broken – is that the willing subject is encouraged to continue to strive for an end to suffering, rather than appreciating that striving is the cause of suffering.

In Act II, as Winnie's suffering increases, she again reminds Willie about the revolver, thus soliciting suicidal contemplation on his part:

> WINNIE: You remember Brownie, Willie, I can see him. [*Pause.*] Brownie is still there, Willie, beside me. [*Pause. Loud.*] Brownie is there, Willie. [*Pause. Eyes front.*] That is all. [*Pause.*] (Beckett, 1961: 25).

Thus despite the fact that Willie's ascetic method of silence later results in Winnie's involuntarily recalling her childhood trauma – in the form of her 'story' (Beckett, 1961: 26) – this particular method also means that Winnie never loses hope, and therefore continues to strive:

> WINNIE: I hear cries... Sing... Sing your old song, Winnie (Becket, 1961: 29).

Again, as was the case with Vladimir, Winnie has approached an awareness of suffering, indeed has come very close, but then withdraws. It is the 'allurement of hope' that allows this withdrawal (WWR 1: 392). Winnie has not lost hope.

In response to this act of striving, Willie is no longer able to endure in suffering. Instead, Willie 'shuns suffering', interrupts the painful procedure 'that would completely cure him' (WWR 1: 399-400) and returns to Winnie as her devoted servant. That Willie has returned to perform his role as servant of the will, to end the will's suffering, is suggested by one of Beckett's drier stage directions:

> *Willie's head appears to her right round corner of the mound. He is on all fours, dressed to kill* (Beckett, 1961: 29).

Here we may also note the knowing subject's servile posture: 'on all fours'. It is the deferential posture of a servant approaching his master.

That Winnie views Willie's suicidal intent as a romantic act of devotion is again captured in the following passage:

> WINNIE: [*Mondaine*]. Well this is an unexpected pleasure! Reminds me of the day you came whining for my hand... I worship you, Winnie, be mine... Life a mockery without Win... What a get up, you do look a sight! ... Where are the flowers? (Beckett, 1961: 29).

Willie then makes a number of concerted, though ultimately unsuccessful, efforts to reach the revolver that sits on the top of the mound. Eventually, lying at the bottom of the mound, Willie breaks his vow of silence, saying the word 'Win' (Beckett, 1961: 30). The willing subject has won this battle of warring opposites. By clambering up the hill in his attempts to silence Winnie, Willie removes the earth from Winnie's breasts and returns her to the state in which she will again be found at the start of Act I. With this, the contemplation of suicide is revealed as a significant setback for the practicing ascetic.

By temporarily relieving her suffering, Willie allows Winnie to continue to perceive the world romantically, naively. In Winnie's romantic understanding of life, Willie is digging her out of the earth with his bare hands (Beckett, 1961: 20). This act – this failure to persist in suffering – permits Winnie to believe that Willie still loves her:

WINNIE: It's true, it's true,

You love me so! (Beckett, 1961: 31).

This in turn permits Winnie to believe in the romanticised idea of love *per se*, and, most importantly of all, to believe that she has always been loved. We may compare Winnie's understanding to that of Hamm, who because his intellect no longer 'loves' him (Beckett, 1958: 14) is now aware of his parents' neglect of the young Hamm, and the way this childhood neglect later played out in his egoistical interactions with others.

In Beckett's tragedies I believe that love is not a 'truth procedure' as Badiou argues, nor is the reward for love 'happiness' (Badiou, 2003: 33). Rather in Beckett's middle-period tragedies, 'love' is shown to be the way one avoids the truth. 'Love' is a suicide attempt, which stops one from thinking of one's childhood abuse. 'Love' is the violence one inflicts upon oneself to stop thinking about the violence others have earlier inflicted, so that one can continue to perceive such abuse as affection. 'Love' does not result in 'happiness'. Rather, in Beckett's work, 'love' permits the continuation of one's suffering.

Conclusion

I have argued that Beckett presents the contemplation of suicide as the main obstacle that the intellect faces in its attempts to break the will. Beckett consistently depicts the demand for suicidal contemplation as a last-ditch attempt by the willing subject to avoid the suffering generated by the intellect during the ascetic method of depriving the will of the painlessness of habitual consciousness. In Beckett's tragedies, the thought that one can always end one's life permits one to live in hope, which in turn permits one to continue to strive, and to continue to

suffer. Without the prospect of there being an end to one's suffering, living in hope is shown to be an intolerable state of affairs.

The next, and last, chapter of this thesis is the Conclusion and Recommendations for Further Research.

Chapter 11: Thesis Conclusion and Recommendations for Further Research

Throughout this thesis I have explored Beckett's middle-period tragedies by interpreting them in the light of the work of Arthur Schopenhauer, Beckett's most important quietist-ascetic predecessor. This approach to Beckett's tragedies provides a challenge to existing philosophical readings of Beckett's work, which I have argued tend to utilize the interpretive lens of Nietzschean thought, particularly Nietzsche's understanding of the life-affirming role of art, and Nietzsche's critique of 'nothing' as 'nihilism'. As a result of the interpretive method developed and utilised here, I have made a number of claims about the nature, and the intent of Beckettian tragedy. These claims relate to the instructive, and destructive role of tragedy in Beckett's aesthetics; Beckett's use of the medium of tragedy to develop his ontological theory regarding the 'will not to suffer'; Beckett's significant development of the dynamically sublime as a central aspect of an aesthetic-ascetic method; and Beckett's understanding of the ultimate value, and utility of the human capacity to reason.

The Role of Tragedy in Beckett's Aesthetics

Nietzsche's interpretation of the life-affirming nature of ancient Greek tragedy has often served as the template, or foundation for the later, post-Nietzschean philosophical interpretation of Beckett's art. For Nietzsche, art affirms life by providing humanity with a means of perceiving the horror of life without being devastated by such knowledge:

> Aware of truth from a single glimpse of it, all man can now see is the horror and absurdity of existence ... it repels him. Here, in this supreme

> menace to the will, there approaches a redeeming, healing enchantress – *art*. She alone can turn these thoughts of repulsion at the horror and absurdity of existence into ideas compatible with life... (1993: 40).

In Nietzschean aesthetics art presents the 'truth' in such a way that it becomes bearable, and allows one to go on. I have consistently argued that the life-affirming lens of Nietzschean aesthetics is a highly problematic theoretical means of interpreting the work of a thinker who was drawn to the life-denying thought of Schopenhauer. In contrast to the dominant philosophical understanding of Beckettian tragedy, I have interpreted *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*, and *Happy Days* as the work of an essentially anti-Nietzschean artist.

I have argued that in Beckett's aesthetics we have tragedy in order that we may no longer be shielded from the destructive potential of reality – the 'suffering of being' – but, rather, to know the 'horror of existence', and as a consequence of this knowledge no longer wish to go on. Further to this, I have argued that the role of art in Beckett's aesthetics is to devastate the 'will not to suffer' with unbearable knowledge of suffering. In Beckett's aesthetics art actively encourages the 'will not to suffer's' *repulsion* by generating the aesthetic moment, an involuntary memory of previously unacknowledged pain. *The role of tragedy* in Beckett's aesthetics is *educative*: tragedy teaches the spectator how to generate an involuntary memory of suffering through ascetic practice. Through the medium of tragedy, Beckett guides the audience through the ascetic process, providing lesson after lesson on both effective and ineffective methods of breaking one's will.

The 'will not to suffer'

Central to this current reading of Beckett's middle-period tragedies is the idea that Beckett's tragic 'pseudocouples' bear many of the traits of Schopenhauer's 'self' as that comprised of 'willing' (ontological) and 'knowing' (epistemological) *aspects*.

This work therefore presents a challenge to Adorno's central claim that Beckettian tragedy lacks metaphysical meaning, which in turn deprives Beckett's work of other traditional aspects such as the transformative epiphany (Adorno, 1991: 242). Instead, I argue that the 'will not to suffer' of Beckett's early critical work *Proust*, an ontological understanding informed by Schopenhauer's will-to-life, is significantly developed in the tragedies of Beckett's middle period. The 'will not to suffer', which is later manifested as the striving aspect of the Beckettian tragic pseudocouple, can be understood as *the* problem for the Beckettian intellect in *Waiting for Godot, Endgame*, and *Happy Days*. Beckett informs us that the essential aspect of the self is oblivious, or insensible to the suffering it has endured or inflicted. The will is insensible to suffering because the intellect has presented it with filtered knowledge that facilitates this state-of-affairs. It is this obliviousness that permits the willing subject to continue to strive, and thus to continue to suffer. To promote the 'will not to suffer's' resignation, the intellect must challenge the will's insensibility. The Beckettian *negative epiphany* provides this challenge to the willing subject's state of obliviousness, or will-not-to-know (WWR 2: 208).

The Beckettian intellect – the other aspect of the Beckett's pseudocouple – seeks to break the 'will not to suffer' by presenting it with previously unacknowledged *involuntary* memories of suffering. The intellect's presentation of an involuntary memory acts as a *negative epiphany*, which presents the 'will not to suffer' with a disincentive for further action. Based upon this knowledge, the 'will not to suffer' may choose to resign from life. Contrary to Adorno, then, this thesis argues that one's metaphysical basis, the Beckettian 'will not to suffer', is *the* problem of Beckettian tragedy, and the negative epiphany is presented as a potential solution to that problem.

Ascetic-Aesthetic Theory: The Beckettian Dynamically Sublime

I have argued that the subject matter of *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*, and *Happy Days* is asceticism, the 'intentional mortification of one's own will' (WWR 2: 613). Whilst the Beckettian tragic intellect also utilizes the 'traditional' kinds of ascetic practice that inhibit the body – methods that Schopenhauer outlines in *The World as Will and Representation* – Beckett's main focus is on the how the intellect might best refuse to furnish the will with a representation of the world that permits the will the certainty it requires to strive towards an object of desire. These three works depict the intellect's varied attempts to refuse the will the 'motivation' that it requires to be able to act. This is the principal *method* of ascetic practice in Beckett's theatre. The primary *form* of ascetic practice depicted in these works is the dynamically sublime.

In this thesis I have charted the development of the dynamically sublime found in Kantian, Schopenhauerian, and Beckettian aesthetics. Kant argues that the sublime presents us with an understanding of our ability to refuse our instinctive drives, and thus to act morally. Building upon this understanding, Schopenhauer further develops Kantian aesthetics (see Shapshay, 2012a: 502) by arguing that our ability to hold the will at bay allows us as to present the will with knowledge that is destructive to life. I believe that Beckett takes this life-denying Schopenhauerian development of the dynamically sublime and presents it artistically. In Beckett's middle-period tragedies the dynamically sublime transitions from an aesthetic theory to an ascetic theory presented theatrically. The Schopenhauerian dynamically sublime, a two-step process where the will *of the spectator* is first held at bay (WWR 1: 202, 392), so that it may then gain knowledge of suffering it would otherwise seek to evade, is later manifested in Beckett's tragedies as the subject matter of the performance. Beckett stages the dynamically sublime. In Beckett's middle-period tragedies the action of the play is the two-stage process of denying the will – by depriving the will of habitual consciousness – so that the will might become aware of the ubiquitous nature of suffering, or 'reality' (Beckett: 1999: 22,

33). Through his tragic works, Beckett explicitly draws the spectator's attention to the ascetic potential of the dynamically sublime as a capacity human beings possess to employ the negative freedom not to act.

Reason – The Capacity to Do Nothing

Beckett's significant contribution to asceticism is to incorporate the human capacity to 'reason' into ascetic practice. Schopenhauer, as we have seen, dismisses the capacity of reason to affect one's will (WWR 1: 185-6, 190). Schopenhauer views reason as a mere 'tool' of the will, which the will utilizes to attain its objectives. Beckett's understanding of reason as a capacity that permits human beings to suspend judgement, and thus to defer action, marks a significant moment in our philosophical understanding of the value of reason. Whereas reason has typically been valued for the way it permits one to *avoid* suffering, in Beckett's work the value of reason is that it permits one to *cause* and *experience* suffering. In this sense, Beckett's understanding of reason deviates significantly from the role ascribed to reason in stoic thought, where the avoidance of suffering is key. Beckett's deployment of reason also differs markedly to the Kantian understanding of reason, as once again in Beckett's aesthetics the ability not to respond to instinctive drives is an end in itself. Beckett's understanding of the value of reason is also un-Schopenhauerian in its nature. Beckett's use of reason has much in common with Schopenhauer's critique of reason, namely that reason has made life worse because 'with the faculty of reason, doubt and error have appeared in the theoretical, care and remorse in the practical' (WWR 1: 35).

The Beckettian intellect deliberately generates 'doubt and error' to prevent action. This is epitomised in *Waiting for Godot* by Lucky's speech, and its ultimate effect on Pozzo:

LUCKY: ... but not so fast for reasons unknown... left unfinished for reasons unknown... left unfinished... for reasons unknown... for reasons unknown... for reasons unknown... approximately by and large more or less... for reasons unknown... in light of the labours lost ... the light of the labours lost... in the year of their Lord six hundred and something... for reasons unknown... but not so fast... for reasons unknown... the labours abandoned left unfinished... abandoned unfinished... unfinished... (Beckett, 1956: 42-45).

In Beckettian asceticism, the generation of 'doubt and error' in turn promotes 'care and remorse'. Reason permits the intellect to hold the will in a painful state of boredom. Whilst held in this non-habitual state, the will experiences the 'suffering of being':

LUCKY: ... figures stark naked in the stockinged feet in Connemara in a word for reasons unknown... the skull... the tears...the skull the skull the skull the skull in Connemara ... the skull the skull in Connemara the skull... (Beckett, 1956: 42-5).

Beckett represents Pozzo's resignation in response to knowledge of suffering – the state of 'nothingness' – through the use of two motifs: the loss of sight, and an inability to respond. These motifs are employed consistently throughout Beckett's theatre of asceticism.

Recommendations for Further Research

Having established a new framework for interpreting Beckett's work – one that understands Beckett's work in the light of the life-denying aspects of Schopenhauerian thought – the next step is to see if the same interpretive method can be used to approach Beckett's other theatrical works, and other aspects of Beckett's oeuvre. I believe that there are a number of Beckett's theatrical works, works contemporaneous to the tragedies discussed in this thesis, as well as earlier and later works, which invite the application of the Schopenhauerian-informed interpretive method.

With regards to Beckett's first completed, but never performed play, *Eleutheria* (1947), I believe the subject matter of the play, particularly that of longing for freedom from oneself, and experiencing 'nothing', invites a reading of the work in the light of Schopenhauerian quietist thought. Once again, I believe understanding the idea of longing for 'nothing' in relation to Schopenhauer's work will help to depathologise the present understanding of nothing as nihilism. Existing readings of *Eleutheria* tend to interpret the desire for 'nothing' through the lens of 'nothing' as nihilism (see, for example, Weller, 1995: 119), and therefore as a critique of 'nothing' on Beckett's part.

With regard to Beckett's later tragedies, I believe the play *Ohio Impromptu* (1981) is a work that can be understood as a late example of Beckettian theatre of asceticism. *Ohio Impromptu* is comprised of a number of formal elements that are also in evidence in the ascetic tragedies of Beckett's middle period. Again the play is comprised of a pseudocouple, in this case that of Reader and Listener. I believe this relationship may be understood as one that is informed by Schopenhauer's understanding of the self as comprised of intellect and will. Again we witness an attempt to end the story-telling life, a life comprised of loss and anxiety, by revealing the impossibility of avoiding suffering. At the end of the short play, the

pseudocouple reaches a state 'Of mindlessness', and the stage directions call for a scene where Reader and Listener are left 'unblinking', and 'expressionless'. This stage direction calls to mind the depiction of Clov at the end of *Endgame* once the will has resigned and the knowing subject is no more. Is *Ohio Impromptu*, therefore, a case of successful ascetic practice? What are we to make of the development in the play, where at the start of the work there is 'Little is left to tell' to the end of the play where there is 'Nothing is left to tell'?

In addition to this claim, namely that other Beckett tragedies lend themselves to a Schopenhauerian-informed, quietist reading, I believe it is also possible to read other instances of Beckett's work in the light of the broad findings of this thesis, i.e., in the light of my claims regarding Beckett's position on the true value of human reason. The middle-period mime, *Act Without Words I* (1957) continues to develop Beckett's position on the utility of reason, namely that reason permits human beings to appreciate that there is nothing to be done. Throughout this short mime, the unnamed character of the man repeatedly 'reflects' upon events until eventually the futility of striving dawns upon him and he ceases to respond to events in the world. Is this a play about the human capacity to reason, to learn from the past, and to project into the future, which permits an awareness of futility, and therefore permits human beings to cease striving? I believe that Beckett's position on reason can be understood as an ongoing development of Schopenhauer's late position on the link between negation and reason, namely that because human beings alone possess the faculty of reason only human beings can reflect on life, and ultimately turn away from life (WWR 2: 637).

How might the reading of Beckett's middle-period tragedies conducted in this thesis affect the way that interpreters of Beckett's work approach other aspects of Beckett's oeuvre? For example, how does a Schopenhauerian-informed reading impact upon the present, largely poststructuralist reading of the middle-period *Trilogy* of novels, *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, and *The Unnameable*? Can it be argued, for example, that Beckett employs different art forms to pursue different objectives? Does Beckett employ the medium of prose to describe the nature of consciousness,

and in turn employ the medium of tragedy to describe the process of ridding oneself of consciousness?

How does this reading of Beckett's tragedies impact upon the present reading of Beckett as a stoic thinker (Nussbaum, 1990; Calder, 2001; Uhlmann, 2008)? Does Beckett's contrarian position on the value of 'reason', and the deleteriousness of suicidal contemplation underline the need to read Beckett's work as a sustained critique of stoic ethics?

Having claimed a common, Schopenhauerian and Beckettian utilization of the negative freedom found in Kantian thought, I believe further research into the Kant-Schopenhauer-Beckett nexus is worthy of investigation. At present, Beckett's relationship to Kantian and Schopenhauerian thought is positioned as an either/or situation (see, for example, Murphy, 1994). In contrast to this position, I believe it is important to note the development of thought from one thinker to the next, as well as moments when such development is later questioned. The importance of this approach was revealed in the section of this thesis where I discussed Beckett's development of the sublime. To date, Beckett's exploration of the sublime has been understood in relation to the Kantian sublime alone (see, for example, Myskja (2002). I argued that Schopenhauer's moral development of the Kantian sublime was in turn further developed by Beckett into an aesthetic-ascetic method. I believe that this kind of development will continue to be under appreciated unless further research is undertaken on the Kant-Schopenhauer-Beckett triumvirate.

Samuel Beckett's contribution to aesthetics, to asceticism, and to the subject of 'reason' is one of great significance, and awaits further exploration and philosophical debate. The present work argues for the need to take into account Beckett's avowed interests when undertaking any interpretive endeavour. By exploring the ramifications of Beckett's sustained engagement with Schopenhauerian thought this work affords a new understanding of Beckett as an artist whose work depicts the ascetic process as a serious ethical matter. This

reading of Beckett's middle-period tragedies as *theatre of asceticism* provides an important counterweight to the *singular*, life-affirming, role assigned to art in Nietzschean and post-Nietzschean thought. Beckett's theatre of asceticism reveals, again and again, that art performs more than one role in life.

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Appendix

Synopsis of the three plays

It is, of course very difficult to describe the plot of a typical Beckett play, as traditional aspects of theatre are generally lacking in Beckettian tragedy. Very little tends to happen. Boredom prevails. Uncertainty seems to permeate every aspect of the work. As the character, Estragon, states in Godot, 'Nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful.' In short, each play comprises two sets of hostile couples, or, to use the Beckettian term, 'pseudocouples' and these pseudocouples are at war with one another.

In Waiting for Godot we have the 'old friends' Vladimir and Estragon, and the master and slave, Pozzo and Lucky. Vladimir and Estragon are down and out. Each evening they wait by the side of a country road for news from a mysterious Godot as to whether today will be the day he calls for them, and lifts them out of their dire circumstances. Vladimir is intent on waiting for Godot. Estragon would prefer that they both leave, or, failing that, go their separate ways. While they wait they bicker, and attempt to pass the time. Along with Vladimir and Estragon, Pozzo and Lucky also traverse the country road. Pozzo is a wealthy landowner and Lucky is his slave, a slave who has taught his master about the nature of the world, but whom of late has started to act in a less than useful fashion. Thus Pozzo is taking Lucky to the fair to 'get rid of him'. In Act I, Pozzo has Lucky entertain Vladimir and Estragon by dancing and thinking aloud. Lucky, who had once thought very 'prettily', now delivers a monologue of seemingly incongruous thoughts. These 'thoughts' cause Pozzo immense suffering. So much so, that in Act II, when Pozzo and Lucky return, Pozzo has gone blind, and Lucky no longer speaks.

In the play Endgame, we are presented with something of a similar scenario. In a bunker near the sea, Hamm, a blind, old man, sits in a wheelchair, and orders his servant, Clov, to do his every bidding. Clov is trying to leave his master, Hamm,

who despite all evidence to the contrary, views himself as benevolent. To this end he retells a story in which he has acted with great generosity.

Though we note that an altogether different version of Hamm's 'character' is beginning to make its way into his narrative. This less favourable portrayal of Hamm – as selfish, malicious, and—one might go so far as to use the Schopenhauerian term 'wicked' (WWR 1: 320) – is slowly introduced to the narrative by his 'servant' Clov. So much so that Hamm is forced to come to terms with his true, destructive nature.

The other couple in the play is that of Nagg and Nell, legless husband and wife, father and mother of Hamm. They are deposited in ashbins on the corner of the stage. Nell is also trying to leave Nagg, who insists on waking her so that he may tell her the same joke he has told each and everyday prior to this one.

The social bond of marriage again serves as the metaphorical relationship, or tie, between both sets of pseudocouples in the play Happy Days. One couple – Winnie-Willie – comprises a nagging wife and browbeaten husband. The other couple – Mr. and Mrs. Shower – is comprised of the inverse of this cliché.

In yet another of Beckett's barren landscapes – alerting us to the diminution of representation (Beckett, 1961: 1) – Winnie and Willie perform a repetitive series of pointless gestures. In Act I Winnie is buried up to her waist in the ground. In Act II she is buried up to her neck. Inversely Willie has burrowed down into the earth. The inference is that Winnie is buried to the extent that Willie performs his excavation. Their relationship is one of demand and reluctant response. Winnie demands that Willie listens to her talk, demands answers to trifling questions. Whereas, Willie seems inclined to want to ignore his partner. In Act II Willie attempts a vow of silence, hoping to remain quiet for long enough that the earth will one day cover Winnie's mouth and silence her for good.

The other couple in Happy Days is comprised of another unhappy husband and wife pairing, Mr. and Mrs. Shower. Again, this couple forms a hostile pairing: Mr. Shower continually asks questions about the events occurring before him, and Mrs. Shower appears to resent their being asked.

Notes

[i] On the subject of Beckett's interest in Thomas à Kempis see Rosen, 1976: 90-1; Knowlson, 1996: 172-4; Ackerley, 2000, 2004; Nixon, 2011: 199. For Beckett's interest in Meister Eckhart see Ackerley, 2004. For Beckett's interest in Arnold Geulincx, see Fletcher, 1965; Ackerley, 2004; Feldman, 2008, 2010; Weller, 2008; Nixon, 2011; Tucker, 2012. And for Beckett's interest in Arthur Schopenhauer see O'Hara, 1981; Weller, 2005, 2009; Pothast, 2008; Feldman, 2010; Nixon, 2011; Wimbush, 2013.

[ii] The one book length work on the Schopenhauer-Beckett nexus, Ulrich Pothast's *The Metaphysical Vision* (2008) does not approach Beckett's work in terms of life-denying ethics. Instead, Pothast focuses primarily on Beckett's development of Schopenhauerian aesthetics.

[iii] See, for example, Rosen, 1976; Knowlson, 1996; Ackerley, 2004; Feldman, 2008, 2010; Pothast, 2008; Nixon, 2011.

[iv] With regard to the subject of *grace* in Beckett's work, see Esslin, 1961: 40-2, and Ackerley, 2004: 36.

[v] I will discuss these approaches in the literature review.

[vi] The main exception to this assertion is the work of Martha Nussbaum (1990). In *Narrative Emotions: Beckett's Genealogy of Love*, Nussbaum reads Beckett's work in the light of stoic thought, and discovers a non-restorative, pessimistic aspect to Beckett's *Trilogy* (1990: 307-8). Nussbaum positions Beckett, then, as an author whose works pursues, though ultimately fails to attain, silence.

[vii] Referring to the works of Sartre and Heidegger, Beckett states, 'I never read the philosophers; I don't understand what they write' (Fletcher, 1965: 43).

[viii] It is should be noted that the discipline of history, which draws upon a number of different, evidence-based, interpretive frameworks to those of literature and comparative literature – for example, Popper's modified essentialism (see Feldman, 2010) – tends not to face the same interpretive problems when it comes to understanding Beckett's interest in Schopenhauerian thought, and philosophy more broadly. See, for example, Feldman, 2006, 2010; Nixon, 2011.

[ix] It also fails to take into account Beckett's diverse approach to a wide range of different pre-Nietzschean philosophers (Feldman, 2010).

[x] Beckett first used the term 'pseudocouple' in the final novel of the 'Trilogy', *The Unnameable.*

[xi] See Appendix for synopsis of the three plays

[xii] The work of Georg Lukacs is an exception to this viewpoint. Lukacs (1963) argues that Beckett's work aims at 'nothing', and that 'nothing' has replaced 'God' as the promise of nihilistic 'salvation' (44). For a comprehensive discussion of the literature on the broader subject of Beckett and nihilism see Weller (2005), and Critchley (1997).

[xiii] A similar approach to Beckett's work is found in the work of Deleuze (1995). In *The Exhausted*, Deleuze reads Beckett's oeuvre as a sustained, and ultimately successful attempt to overcome the nihilism of language. Medium by medium, Beckett progresses towards a state of silence.

[xiv] The immediate problem that one sees with this particular argument is that Hamm does not want to 'conclude the game', nor does he wish to finish his story (Beckett, 1958: 12, 49). Indeed, Hamm makes a number of attempts throughout *Endgame* to continue his 'chronicle'. It is Clov, Hamm's ascetic intellect, that wishes to bring the game to an end. I will discuss Hamm's unwillingness to 'end' in Chapter 5 where I situate Hamm as the willing aspect of the Hamm-Clov pseudocouple, one of the key traits of which is ceaseless striving.

[xv] See also Nussbaum, (1990: 305) where Nussbaum also holds that 'We can be redeemed only by ending the demand for redemption, by ceasing to use the concepts of redemption'.

[xvi] Pothast's work also contrasts with the work of earlier thinkers working in the field of literary studies, such as Rosen, who posit that whilst Beckett's early work explores the idea of there being a metaphysical basis to existence, in his later work Beckett consistently argues that that basis is ultimately unknowable (see Rosen, 1976: 14-5). For Rosen, Beckett's work does not lead to knowledge – metaphysical or teleological – other, that is, than knowledge of one's own ignorance.

[xvii] I shall further discuss the 'ordinary', 'will-full' way of perceiving life in a later chapter (Chapter 6) in which I discuss Beckett's theatrical 'pseudocouples' in relation to Schopenhauer's subjects of willing and knowing.

[xviii] Cf. Beckett, 1956: 74, where the intellect, Estragon declares, 'I'm in hell!' This draws out attention to the way Beckett relocates the experience of the spectator on to the stage.

[xix] See also Atwell, 1996: 98; Janaway, 1996: 56-57; Trigg: 2004: 172; Young, 2005: 120; Shapshay, 2012a: 494.

[xx] Pothast notes that Beckett uses Proust's work as a 'stepping stone for setting out his own thoughts about art... which are in fact philosophical and metaphysical thoughts' (2008: 4).

[xxi] Though the influence of Schopenhauerian aesthetics on Beckett's *early critical* work has been widely acknowledged (see, for example, Acheson, 1978; Pothast, 2008; Wood, 1994; Murphy, 1994; Feldman, 2010), it is also generally held to be the case that any influence is short-lived for being quickly transcended. Indeed it is commonplace in the secondary literature on Beckett's literary and philosophical influences to cordon off the influence of Schopenhauer to the very early stage of Beckett's writing career (see, for example, Pothast, 2008: 6; Murphy, 1994: 234). There are, of course, exceptions to this position on Schopenhauerian influence – predominantly in the fields of literary criticism, and history – where the implications of Beckett's engagement with Schopenhauer are seen to extend throughout Beckett's oeuvre (see, for example, O'Hara, 1981; Olivier, 1996; Nixon, 2007; Feldman, 2006: 12; Feldman, 2010; Nixon, 2011).

It is, however, more common in the secondary literature of Beckett's *philosophical* interpreters to either omit the influence of Schopenhauer altogether (see, for example, Critchley, 1997), or to suggest Schopenhauerian metaphysics is subject to Beckettian derision (Adorno, 1991: 269). Whilst it is most certainly the case that Beckett's utilization of Schopenhauerian aesthetics is not merely a matter of unquestioned reception, to then proceed to claim that the ramifications of Beckett's engagement are short-lived – or, for that matter non-existent – is, I believe, a highly debatable assertion. Note, Pothast (2008) is one of Beckett's philosophical interpreters who suggests an early, and continuous, Beckettian engagement with Schopenhauerian thought.

[xxii] This position on knowledge contrasts with that of Rosen who argues that Beckett's aesthetics differs to Schopenhauer's in that it does not lead to knowledge, except in sense of realised ignorance (1976:15). In contrast, I argue that in Beckett's tragedies one realises one has been ignorant *and* one learns of what one has been ignorant.

[xxiii] See Knowlson, 1996: 118, 215, 226, 268, 271, 653; Feldman, 2006: 12; Pothast, 2008: 12-15; Weller, 2009: 43-44.

[xxiv] Again, this is not to say that the mathematical sublime is absent from Beckettian tragedy, an example of which is Pozzo's description of the 'night' in *Waiting for Godot* (Beckett, 1956: 38). My claim, however, is that the mathematical sublime plays a secondary role to the structural aspect provided by Beckett's repeated employment of the dynamically sublime.

[xxv] The only book-length work dedicated solely to the subject of Beckett's utilization of Schopenhauerian thought (Pothast, 2008) makes no reference to the sublime.

[xxvi] For although Beckett's work has also been discussed in relation to the postmodern sublime (Olivier, 1996; Smith, 2004; Slade, 2007; Tubridy, 2010), and a critique of the 'romantic' sublime (Eastham, 2007), and the Wittgensteinian sublime (Rudrum, 2009), for reasons of scope, and because I wish to argue for a genetic understanding of Beckettian middle-period tragedy, I shall focus on the secondary material that has sought to understand the Beckettian sublime in relation to the Kantian sublime alone.

[xxvii] In addition to this, by implicitly discounting Beckett's engagement with Schopenhauerian aesthetics a more direct approach to the sublime and art – and more specifically, tragedy – has also been overlooked. Indeed, in the work of Schopenhauer we do not have to work by analogy, as in regard to the sublime and tragedy, Schopenhauer draws a direct connection:

> Our pleasure in the *tragedy* belongs not to the feeling of the beautiful, but to that of the sublime; it is, in fact, the highest degree of this feeling ... in the tragic catastrophe we turn away from the will-to-life itself (WWR 2: 433).

In contrast to this, Myskja is forced to defend his approach of applying the Kantian sublime to works of art, as much of the focus of the Kantian sublime is the feeling elicited by forces of nature, and not works of art (Myskja, 2002: 233). Thus Myskja has to defend his discussion of a Beckettian novel by analogy to Kant's discussion of poetry (*ibid.*). Similarly, Tubridy (2010) applies Kant's understanding of the mathematical sublime to a form of art – theatre – which plays no part in Kant's aesthetic discussion. This would be less of a concern if a more obvious candidate for understanding Beckett's approach to the sublime did not exist. However, I believe such a candidate exists in the form of Schopenhauerian aesthetics.

[xxviii] For a more comprehensive analysis of Schopenhauer's ontology and epistemology see Janaway, 1989; Young, 1987; Atwell 1990, 1995.

[xxix] See the First and Second Books of WWR 1 and Chapter XIX of WWR 2. Schopenhauer also sets out the ways in which the intellect can subvert its typical function in the Third Book of WWR.

[xxx] See, for example, Worton, 1994; Catanzaro, 1986; Cavell 2002: 117; Badiou, 2003: 74; Weller, 2006; Barry, 2008; Pothast, 2008; Baroghel, 2010.

[xxxi] See Janaway (1989: 265-6) for criticism of Schopenhauer's assertion.

[xxxii] This reading has a precursor in the work of Martin Esslin (1961). However, Esslin's own influences (primarily Sartrean existentialism) mean that his understanding of the Beckettian pseudocouple as will and intellect is almost instantly discounted in preference for uncertainty of meaning. That Esslin was able to suggest that Beckett's work may represent the intellectual and emotional sides of life, and yet go no further with this observation itself suggests a critique of reading Beckett in the light of theory that has no bearing on

the formation of the artwork – in this case Esslin reads Beckett in the light of existentialism. Reading Beckett in the light of Sartrean existentialism provides Esslin with a conception of 'nothing' as 'open possibility', rather than the Schopenhauerian 'nothing' as that beyond conceptual thought. Given this Sartrean understanding of nothingness as the blank slate upon which one writes one's life, Esslin cannot take the next step and work through the life-denying implications of his reading of Beckett's theatre as that of 'personality in conflict' (51). In addition to this, Esslin's claim that certain readings ought not be pursued if certain questions cannot be definitively answered prevents Esslin from exploring *Endgame* as an example of 'monodrama' (50).

[xxxiii] See, for example, Chapter XIX, 'On the Primacy of the Will in Self-Consciousness', in Vol. 2; but also the very division of the main work (Vol. 1) into epistemological and ontological *aspects.*

[xxxiv] I will discuss this process in much greater detail in Chapters 8 and 9, 'Beckettian asceticism'.

[xxxv] For the Kantian basis to this thought see *The Critique of Pure Reason* see WWR 1: 289).

[xxxvi] See the First Book of *WWR.* Schopenhauer also details the intellect's capacity to deny its will-serving function in the Third Book of *WWR,* i.e., in aesthetic contemplation.

[xxxvii] We know that Beckett was well versed in both works (see Pothast, 2008: 13, 26).

[xxxviii] See Atwell, 1995: 38-39, 43-44, 53; Janaway, 1989 172; White, 1999: 70; Young, 2005: 37.

[xxxix] For criticism of Schopenhauer's position see, for example, Hamlyn, 1980: 18-21; 54-63; Young, 1987: Chapter 2; Janaway, 1989.

[xl] See Nietzsche, 1997: 81 for a criticism of this tendency in philosophy.

[xli] See WWR 1: 152, 233, 274, 393; WWR 2: Chaps. 29-31; Schopenhauer, 1974b Vol. 2: chapter 14 and 19.

[xlii] I will later (Chapter 10) compare this ethical act to another means of self-destruction, namely that of *suicide.*

[xliii] See Young, 2005: 190; Atwell, 1995: 170; Zöller, 1995: 8.

[xliv] See, for example, Adorno, 1991; Critchley, 1997, Weller, 2005, 2009; Pothast, 2008; Boxall, 2010.

[xlv] Again, an exception to this position is found in the work of Lukacs (1963) who understands Beckettian tragedy as an example of apolitical nihilism.

[xlvi] Atwell takes this understanding from a letter written by Schopenhauer dated September 1 1860.

[xlvii] One may note that the otherwise comprehensive edited collection by Smith allocates no space to the influence of Schopenhauerian ethics on Beckettian thought. There is only a passing comment about the importance of Schopenhauer's work in the formation of Beckettian ethics in the collected work *Beckett and Nothing.* Here Weller raises the matter, but does not explore the implications of Beckett's interest (Weller, 2010: 111).

[xlviii] Weller's claims of Beckett's 'anethicality', that is, that Beckett's work is neither ethical nor unethical (2006: 190-95; 2010b: 127) are, I believe, a result of the fact that the life-denying implications of the Schopenhauer-Beckett nexus have not been comprehensively explored. To discount the possibility that Beckett's work is ethical before attempting to understand Beckett's engagement with Schopenhauerian asceticism renders claims of anethicality premature.

[xlix] This understanding of Beckett's work bears a number of similarities to Uhlmann's (2008) understanding of Beckett's utilization of stoic thought. Uhlmann discusses Beckett's interest in the human capacity to 'actively refuse' to realize a potential, or passion, by 'withholding assent' (59). Whilst there is little doubt that stoic thought played an important role in Beckett's philosophical education, Uhlmann's reading of Beckett's work suggests that Beckett's interest was ultimately in perturbation, that is, Beckett is more interested in states of distress rather than the apathy brought about by reason (60). This marks the main difference between Uhlmann's reading and my own. It is my argument that Beckett is very much interested in the emotionless state that lies beyond perturbation.

[l] The danger of *altogether* refusing the will is implied in Act I of *Godot*, when Pozzo, in response to Vladimir's question as to whether Lucky ever refuses to perform, replies that Lucky 'refused once' (Beckett, 1956: 40). The implication is that Lucky's complete refusal was met with such violence that such behaviour has since been avoided. This is an important Beckettian comment on the necessity of the ascetic intellect finding alternative ways of denying the will the requisite motivation. Indeed it is vital that the intellect appears to continue to be a servant of the will. The problem of not responding at all will be discussed in relation to the knowing subject, Willie.

[li] Although one might note the comment towards the end of *WWR* vol. 2 where Schopenhauer suggests that only human beings possess the faculty of reason, and because of this only in human beings can the will deny itself and turn away from life (WWR 2: 637). By this, I understand Schopenhauer to mean that without the capacity for reason, humanity would not be able to understand the causes and consequences of suffering because it would not be able to stop and reflect upon past actions, and project their consequences into the future.

[lii] See, for example, Adorno, 1991: 243; Critchley, 1997: 141; Badiou, 2003: 4; Weller, 2006: 2, 27-8.

[liii] Deleuze is one interpreter who argues that silence is both the goal of Beckettian art, and a goal that is ultimately achieved. In *The Exhausted* (1995) Deleuze reads Beckett's work an example of Nietzschean overcoming. Thus although silence is sought and attained in Beckettian art, it is pursued in an attempt to overcome the nihilism of language. Once again, then, the application of a Nietzschean lens results in a reading of Beckett's work that ultimately understands Beckett's quietism as a life-affirming endeavour.

[liv] Remembering that unlike Schopenhauer, 'Beckett gives a voice to the will (O'Hara, 1981: 265, 267).

[lv] Cf. Schopenhauer: 'The ceaseless efforts to banish suffering achieve nothing more than a change in its form' (WWR 1: 315).

[lvi] See Chapter 10 of this thesis for a detailed discussion of the motif of suicidal contemplation in Beckettian tragedy.

[lvii] The willing aspect of *Endgame's* minor pseudo-couple, Nagg, is similarly unable to comprehend others' suffering. Indeed, Nagg's tendency is to make light of such things:

HAMM:	There's something dripping in my head... A heart, a heart in my head.
NAGG:	Do you hear him? A heart in his head!
	He chuckles cautiously (Beckett, 1958: 19-20)

[lviii] See note xlix

[lix] Nagg and Nell exist in the skull as a means of making Hamm suffer – he suffers the knowledge of being neglected as a child:

HAMM:	Scoundrel! Why did you engender me?
NAGG:	I didn't know.
HAMM:	What? What didn't you know?
NAGG:	That it'd be you (Beckett, 1958: 35).

And later:

NAGG:	We let you cry. Then we moved you out of earshot, so that we might sleep in peace (38).

Thus one of the suffering 'Other's' of which Hamm becomes cognizant is that of himself as a neglected child.

[lx] Once again, this unique Beckettian ascetic method also incorporates more traditional aspects of asceticism (WWR 1: 380-82), such as fasting, which in Clov's case is marked by an indifference to sustenance (Beckett, 1958: 14), celibacy – depicted as the refusal to propagate (17), and the urge to eradicate life (27, 37, 49) – and self-mortification, or the deliberate infliction of physical suffering:

CLOV:	(*He starts pacing to and fro, his eyes fixed on the ground, his hands behind his back. He halts.*) The pains in my legs! It's unbelievable! Soon I won't be able to think anymore.
HAMM:	You won't be able to leave me. (*Clov resumes his pacing.*) (33).
HAMM:	Give me a rug, I'm freezing.
CLOV:	There are no more rugs (44)

Similarly, *Endgame's* minor knowing subject, Nell, also evinces traditional methods of asceticism when she refuses food (18) and refuses to go in from the cold (19).

[lxi] Similarly, *Endgame's* other willing subject, Nagg, asks Nell for the provision of voluntary memories (1958: 18-19).

[lxii] Cf. Schopenhauer – the important thing to the will is not the individual but the species (WWR 1: 276).

[lxiii] Similarly, Nagg's callous character is revealed through the deprivation of habitual thought. Instead of laughing along, Nell instead alerts the willing subject to its propensity to dismiss the suffering of others:

HAMM:	There's something dripping in my head. A heart, a heart in my head.
NAGG:	Do you hear him? A heart in his head!
	He chuckles cautiously.
NELL:	One mustn't laugh at those things, Nagg. Why must you always laugh at them?
NAGG:	Not so loud!
NELL:	(*without lowering her voice*). Nothing is funnier than unhappiness, I grant you that. But——
NAGG:	(*shocked.*) Oh!
NELL:	Yes, yes, it's the most comical thing in the world. And we laugh, we laugh with a will, in the beginning. But it's always the same thing. Yes, it's like the funny story we have heard too often, we still find it funny, but we don't laugh any more. (*Pause.*) Have you anything to say to me? (Beckett, 1958: 20).

We may note that Nagg still tells the oft-told joke about the tailor who compares his trousers to the shoddy work of God, but Nell no longer laughs. This is the first time that the knowing subject has not laughed at this joke (21). Nagg's joke, then, is analogous to Hamm's chronicle: a version of the world that permits one not to appreciate one's attitude. Deprived of laughter, Nagg subsequently recalls his behaviour when his son, Hamm, was still a baby, namely letting the child cry, and then moving him out of ear shot so that they could get some sleep. By no longer laughing, Nell has woken Nagg to the suffering of the world, and his indifference to it.

[lxiv] For example, see Adorno, 1991: 269; Weller, 2005: 140, Connor, 1992(b): 136, Critchley, 1997: 152; Horowitz, 2004: 123, Esslin, 1961: 49; Pothast, 2008: 213.

[lxv] *Endgame's* one act structure alludes to finality. In writing about *Waiting for Godot*, the theatre critic Hugh Kenner argued that the two act structure suggests a series, perhaps an infinite series (Boxall, 2000: 73). Weller believes that unlike *Godot* which is interminable, *Endgame* is very much terminal, and that this is reflected in the refusal of the two act structure (Weller, 2005: 137-9).

[lxvi] Similarly, Nell no longer responds to the sound of Nagg's knuckles rapping on her ashcan lid (Beckett, 1958: 38).

[lxvii] See O'Hara, 1981, 1997; Ricks, 1993: 153; Büttner, 2000; Uhlmann, 2006; Pothast 2008; Valentine, 2009. Laird (2012) provides an overview of the modernist approach to the subject of suicide, which incorporates a discussion of Beckett's work. Laird, however, does not explore the motif of suicide in any systematic way with regards to Beckett's oeuvre, but rather concentrates on Beckett's first published literary work, *More Pricks than Kicks*. Laird's conclusions also tend to view Beckett's employment of suicide as a modernist literary device rather than an ethical concern:

> the horror of suicide yielded to something peculiarly literary and distinctively modernist: a kind of play, chatty or profound, cheerful or desolate, with suicide's often traditional, often irrational rationales (544).

[lxviii] Here Büttner overlooks the fact that Gogo did actually attempt to drown himself in the Rhône (Beckett, 1956: 53).

[lxix] This is another important difference between breaking the will and suicide; suicide precludes the possibility of perceiving the world as the pure subject of knowledge, that is, in a manner free from the limitations of the principle of sufficient reason (WWR 1: 198).

[lxx] Vladimir and Estragon's behaviour alerts us to Schopenhauer's critique of Stoic ethics regarding stoicism's final resort to suicide as a means of avoiding suffering (WWR 1: 87-91). Beckett's apparent endorsement of Schopenhauer's critique of Stoic ethics – that the resort to suicide raises questions about the viability of any system that advocates the avoidance of suffering – raises a number of questions about the extent to which Beckett can be aligned with Stoic thought (see Nussbaum, 1990; Calder, 2001; Uhlmann, 2008).